Social media identity in niche sports: the use of social media by U.S. rugby

by

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# Abstract

Rugby was created in 1876 and since then has expanded from the colleges of England to a globally played sport.  Rugby, along with many other sports such as lacrosse and cricket, has found difficulties in obtaining mainstream media attention in the United States.  This series of in-depth interviews explore how U.S. rugby may be able to utilize social media to elevate rugby to mainstream media status.  This study will use in-depth interviews to understand the strategies of Division 1 Men's U.S. Rugby social media officials and media strategists from the Professional Rugby Organization (PRO).  These in-depth interviews will first identify what strategies rugby has used, then will evaluate which strategies efficiency.  Second, the in-depth interviews of the club-level social media chairs will also be asked about his or her background in social media strategy.  The information collected will be used to make recommendations as to what professional rugby and club-level rugby strategies should be used on social media. The information will also be used to identify what level social media rugby chairs should be educated or trained in using social media, if any.  This study also explored the outcomes of the social media efforts for the advancement of rugby in the U.S. as well as emerging sports in the future.

# Table of Contents

# List of Figures

# List of Tables

# Introduction

Rugby has been a recognized professional sport since 1995 and has expanded around the globe (Rookward, 2003). The sport of rugby is new to the U.S. at a professional level, but has yet to gain the attention of the mainstream media. The National Rugby Football League (NRFL) began in Spring 2015 and was terminated by 2016. The Professional Rugby Organization (PRO) began and ended in 2016 due to sanctions not being upheld by the governing body of the league. Within the span of two years, two different professional rugby leagues had regulatory difficulties with the governing body known as USA Rugby. As a result, rugby in the U.S. has yet to find a stable professional presence (Clifton, 2016). Thankfully, this issue has been a topic of research in other niche sports and the answer to rugby's situation may be able to be improved.

There has been research done on niche sports and the benefits of using social media to increase awareness among fans (Greenhalgh, Simmons, Hambrick, and Greenwell, 2011; Dixon, Martinez, Martin, 2015; Geurin & Clavio 2015; Thompson, Martin, Gee, Eagleman, 2014). However, the research done on the expansion of rugby, in specific, is rather small (Kocher, 2014). This study would add to the research available for niche sports, especially in the context of rugby in the U.S.

## Justification for Research and Study Benefits

The purpose of this study is to better understand the use of social media and the role social media chairs of rugby organizations have in the growth of their teams or leagues. Further, this study looks to explore the background of mass communication, whether it be training or formal education, of social media chairs tasked with raising awareness and interacting with fans. This study examines the types of social media outlets and posts used by social media chairs in an

1

effort to determine whether the posts were effective. This study also seeks to ascertain the types of strategies, target audiences, and job descriptions of the social media chairs.

More research on the impact of the social media of rugby is needed because while match attendance, finances, and regulations are large factors in the growth of a new sport in the U.S. (Kocher, 2014; Greenhalgh et al., 2011), these factors can be changed using social media (Vann, Woodford, & Bruns, 2015). Legacy media outlets (television, radio, print) do not cover niche or new sports because these sports do not have the following of mainstream sports (football, basketball, baseball) (Greenhalgh et al., 2011; Kocher, 2014). By raising awareness of rugby in the U.S., the public will be enticed to attend matches, which will raise the sport's profile (Park, Mahony, & Greenwell, 2010).

Several studies show that social media, as a coherent and deliberate medium, can connect and build audiences (Crawford, 2004; Kocher, 2014; Dixon, et al., 2015; Vann, et al., 2015). A study by Briones, Kuch, Liu & Jin (2011) showed that creating relationships with audiences through two-way communication in the emerging digital age is effective and necessary for building strong, lasting relationships. The same can be said about building relationships in sports (Kocher, 2014; Greenhalgh, et al., 2011). With the match attendance rising, the sales of merchandise and possible tickets for attending the games will increase the amount of revenue for the clubs (Park et al., 2010).

With the results of this study, future research could be conducted to further examine the other branches of rugby including: women's teams and leagues, regions other than the Midwest, and collegiate and high school rugby levels. Outside of rugby, the results of this study can be used as a baseline of information for other niche sports attempting to emerge in the U.S. In terms of the immediate business use of this study, USA Rugby has expressed that a third attempt

at creating a professional rugby league in the U.S. is underway. Major League Rugby (MLR) will begin in 2018 and is projected to have nine teams, elevating some existing club-level teams to professional status (Clifton, 2017a). If the social media chairs of the existing teams continue to be in charge of social media efforts for the newly professional teams, the results and recommendations of this study may be able to help raise awareness within each team's respective community.

**Methodology of the Study**

This study was conducted through in-depth interviews. These interviews were conducted over email to better understand the social media chairs of club level rugby players and PRO League social media chairs' strategies used on social media. The in-depth interviews were conducted over email to allow for reflection of thought, comfort of the interviewed subjects, and to be able to reach social media chairs from far distances. This type of interview allows for the interviewed person to give more thoughtful answers. Email allowed the interviewed individual time, if needed, to look up certain statistics or refer to notes not readily available during a phone interview. The rich qualitative data was subject to a thematic analysis and the answers to the interview questions were placed into different themes.

**Scope of Study**

The scope of this study is rather small. Due to the time constraints and convenience of obtaining the in-depth interviews, the number of interviewed social media chairs was not large enough to make a sample, only a pool of interviewees. Further, this study only collected interviews from one region and one level of the sport of rugby within the U.S. Additionally, only one interview was obtained from the Professional Rugby Organization because the PRO league disbanded in 2016.

The scope of the data may be small, but the information gathered may be beneficial in future research. This study may be able to be replicated for other types, levels, and regions within rugby. Additionally, this study could be utilized by other niche sports, such as lacrosse or cricket, which have found difficulty growing to become a mainstream sport (Greenhalgh et al., 2011).

**Structure of Report**

Chapter 1 consists of a breakdown of the study and a summary of its objectives. The purpose of Chapter 2 begins with an overview of the origin of rugby and its growth in the U.S., with a focus on the club level and the attempts to create a professional league in the U.S. Next, Chapter 2 reviews the sports industry in the U.S. and review of U.S. sports over time will begin with the use of legacy media (Television, radio, print) and continue to explain the use and integration of social media. Chapter 2 covers the positioning and definition of niche sports in the U.S. and the elevation of niche sports through the use of social media. Chapter 2 also explains the importance of job description, job structure, and the importance of using a social media strategy. The two theories of framing and impression management are discussed in Chapter 2 as well. Chapter 2 ends with the purpose and the research questions for this study.

Chapter 3 is the methodology of this study. Chapter 3 explains the purpose of choosing in-depth interviews as the format of this study. In-depth interviews were chosen to obtain rich qualitative data in order to understand the duties of club-level and professional league social media chairs in this study. The rationale for choosing the interviewed social media chairs of the specific club rugby and professional league is also in Chapter 3. Lastly, Chapter 3 contains all the questions and justifications for asking the questions in each section of the in-depth interviews

and explains the use of thematic analysis.  The thematic analysis of this study was split into two recurring themes, which will be explained in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 reports the data collected from the interviews, which were put into three categories or themes: background and job structure, social media strategy and planning, and outcomes of social media efforts to advance rugby. The first category explored the background of the social media chairs in terms of the formal education or training for mass communication, the job structure of being a social media chair, and the routine duties tasked to each chair.  The second category focused on the targets of the social media chair's efforts, what outlets were used to reach those targets, and what types of posts and interaction was done to connect with the target audiences.  The last category explains the outcomes of the efforts on social media from the chairs, the promotional events the social media chairs done in addition to social media efforts, and the goals for the future of the chairs interviewed. Each question asked in the in-depth interviews is located in Chapter 4 along with the answers from the social media chairs.  No further analysis or comparison was done in Chapter 4. The questions were open-ended and had no identifying key words that were sought after in the answers given.

Chapter 5 discusses the results of this study in comparison with the literature found in Chapter 2.  Chapter 5 also discusses the major findings and what steps are recommended from the research in this study.  A best practices model was created from the existing models made in Castronovo & Huang (2012) and Wysocki (2012).  Limitations of the study are explained in detail in Chapter 5, along with future research that could stem from the findings of the study for rugby and for niche sports emerging into the U.S.

**Summary**

This study will explore the communication and promotions strategies already used by U.S. rugby at the professional and club-level to target its U.S. fan base. The study will also consider the social media identity strategies utilized by rugby club-level teams and the PRO league in the U.S. and compare it to social media best practice guidelines to evaluate the effectiveness of and/or areas of improvement for rugby as a sport.

The model of social media best practices from Castronovo & Huang (2012) is designed for small to medium-sized organizations attempting to emerge in their respective markets.  Along with Wysocki's (2012) model explaining the best practices of the National Basketball Association (NBA), this research will combine both best practice models to explain the most successful social media strategies for a sport that is attempting to emerge in its market among larger competition.

**Rugby: From England to the United States**

The sport of rugby began at the Rugby School in Warwickshire, England, in 1876. William Webb Ellis supposedly picked up a football (soccer ball) during a match, and ran with it while the game was in play, which led to the game spreading through the colleges of England. Rugby had its place in the 1900 Olympic Games twenty-four years after the game's inception (Rookward, 2003) and after a hiatus of 92 years, returned to the Olympic games in 2016 due to its growing popularity around the globe (DiNunzio, 2016).  Rugby emerged as a professional sport across much of Europe, starting in France in 1995 when countries began paying their players (Rookward, 2003).  The sport struggled to find a place within the U.S. after winning the gold medal in the 1924 Olympics primarily because of the rapid growth and popularity of American football (DiNunzio, 2016).

While there has been a steady expansion in the rest of the world, rugby has yet to achieve consistent legacy media coverage in the United States (Rookward, 2003; Kocher, 2014). Giles (2014) found that there was a 14 percent increase in rugby players in the U.S. between 2009-2014, bringing the number to 1.2 million registered players. USA Rugby had 2,673 registered clubs within the U.S. as of 2016 ("Overview," n.d.).  The awareness of the sport has been growing in the U.S. at a club-level to the point where USA Rugby created its own professional league in 2016.

Professional rugby is the highest level played within the U.S. and has players who are paid by the league. Club-level rugby is the second-highest level of rugby in the U.S. under professional, and the players are not paid. The Professional Rugby Organization (PRO) had five teams in five major cities: Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, Denver, and Obetz (Ohio). PRO rugby was disbanded in December 2016 due to allegations that it breached contract agreements with USA Rugby (Clifton, 2016).

Owner and CEO of PRO, Doug Schoninger described the reasons and repercussions of the issues the PRO league had with USA Rugby in a letter:

> *PRO Rugby Players,*
>
> *As some of you may or may not know, we have been having serious issues with the cooperation and the enforcement of our agreement with USA Rugby. We have been actively trying to resolve our issues with USA Rugby for over four months and, unfortunately, it appears that USA Rugby will not honor the commitments they made to us.*
>
> *Because of this, we are notifying all presently agreed players of PRO Rugby that we are exercising the Voluntary Termination clause in your contract (section 5(b)). We are hopeful, but with no assurances, that we will be able to resolve all issues with USA Rugby prior to end of the termination clause period. We will keep you up to date with any progress or news as it becomes available.*
>
> *Please remember, until the end of the termination clause you are still an employee of PRO Rugby and all duties and obligations should be adhered to.*

*Because of the above, payment for the period ending on December 15th was delayed. These payments will be issued tomorrow, December 21st for receipt no later than December 22, 2016.*

*I am very sorry that we were forced to take this action and we are trying to do everything we can to ensure that PRO Rugby, its players, coaches, and employees are all treated fairly.*

*Doug Schoninger (Clifton, 2016, para. 6-11)*

While rugby has had some issues finding its place within the U.S., next to the three largest sports (American football, basketball, and baseball), it has had rapid growth within the U.S. in terms of levels of participation. Dan Payne, the CEO of USA Rugby, reported that there are 35,000 high school players, which is ten times the number of high school players in 2006 (Williams, 2016). The Official Website of USA Rugby revealed that participation expanded to youth leagues (11,519 registered players) and rookie leagues (3,501 registered players) in 2016. New leagues also formed in 2016 with 65 amateur and 16 women's middle school leagues ("Overview," n.d.). USA Rugby data shows the largest concentrations of rugby participants in the U.S. reside in the Middle and South Atlantic and the Pacific Regions ("Overview," n.d.). Table 2.1 is a breakdown of the demographics of rugby players within the United States.

USA Rugby is the governing body for all leagues, and is made up of teams from similar regions. The Board of Directors, national office, and congress oversee the segmented governing bodies such as the Geographic Union, College Conference, and State Rugby Organizations ("Overview," n.d). Each state belongs to one of eight geographic unions within the U.S. that determines the teams that play each other within a league and then determines which teams will play in each regional championship to get to the national championship ("Overview," n.d.).

**Table 2.1: Total Rugby Participants in 2016**

## Total Rugby Participants (1+times/year)

| | Total # of Part. (000s) | Segment % | Participation Rate by Group | Index vs. Total Population |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total** | 1,130 | - | 0.4% | - |
| | | | | |
| **Male** | 772 | 68.3% | 0.6% | 139 |
| **Female** | 358 | 31.7% | 0.2% | 62 |
| | | | | |
| 6~12 | 55 | 4.9% | 0.2% | 50 |
| 13~17 | 138 | 12.2% | 0.6% | 152 |
| 18~24 | 168 | 14.9% | 0.6% | 146 |
| 25~34 | 352 | 31.2% | 0.8% | 213 |
| 35~44 | 192 | 17.0% | 0.5% | 114 |
| 45~54 | 202 | 17.9% | 0.4% | 107 |
| 55~64 | 19 | 1.7% | 0.1% | 14 |
| 65+ | 3 | 0.3% | 0.0% | 2 |
| | | | | |
| Under $25000 | 248 | 21.9% | 0.5% | 129 |
| $25000 to $49999 | 154 | 13.6% | 0.2% | 59 |
| $50000 to $74999 | 244 | 21.6% | 0.4% | 110 |
| $75000 to $99999 | 201 | 17.8% | 0.5% | 125 |
| $100000+ | 282 | 25.0% | 0.4% | 97 |
| | | | | |
| New England | 26 | 2.3% | 0.2% | 48 |
| Middle Atlantic | 319 | 28.2% | 0.8% | 209 |
| East North Central | 91 | 8.1% | 0.2% | 52 |
| West North Central | 19 | 1.7% | 0.1% | 25 |
| South Atlantic | 252 | 22.3% | 0.5% | 114 |
| East South Central | 14 | 1.2% | 0.1% | 21 |
| West South Central | 49 | 4.3% | 0.2% | 38 |
| Mountain | 113 | 10.0% | 0.6% | 141 |
| Pacific | 249 | 22.0% | 0.6% | 140 |
| | | | | |
| Non-MSA | 36 | 3.2% | 0.1% | 21 |
| MSA <500,000 | 151 | 13.4% | 0.3% | 71 |
| MSA 500,000-2,000,000 | 208 | 18.4% | 0.3% | 75 |
| MSA 2,000,000+ | 734 | 65.0% | 0.6% | 158 |
| | | | | |
| 8th Grade or Less | 92 | 8.1% | 0.3% | 68 |
| 1-3 years of High School | 126 | 11.2% | 0.7% | 173 |
| High School Grad | 58 | 5.1% | 0.1% | 29 |
| 1-3 years of College | 235 | 20.8% | 0.3% | 83 |
| College Grad | 454 | 40.2% | 0.7% | 169 |
| Post-Grad Studies | 166 | 14.7% | 0.4% | 109 |
| Other | - | - | - | - |

Note. Adapted from "Overview" by USA Rugby, 2016. USA Rugby, 2016. Reprinted with permission.

**U.S. Rugby: Finding its Place in the Current U.S. Media Environment**

Rugby can fall into two of the four different categories of niche sports (emerging sports and gender-specific leagues), but the focus of this study will be on emerging rugby teams because of their specific use of social media to expand their sport (Vann et al., 2015). Rosner and Shropshire (2004) and Greenhalgh et al., (2011) explain the four niche sport categories. The first is minor league sports, which do not represent the highest level of the sport such as Minor League Baseball (MiLB). The second category is comprised of sports that represent the top level of its sport, but does not receive the same amount of media coverage as mainstream sports such as beach volleyball (AVP) and Professional Bull Riders (PBR). The third is indoor alternatives to outdoor sports such as the Arena Football League (AFL) and Professional Arena Soccer League (PASL). The final category is comprised of gender-specific sports such as the WNBA and the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA). U.S. rugby is considered an emerging sport, as it does not obtain the same legacy media coverage as mainstream alternatives such as the NFL (Greenhalgh et al., 2011). Rugby is also a gender-specific sport, just as soccer is, as it has two separate and distinct leagues for men and women in America and each has separate fan bases.

Rugby has not had much legacy media attention in the U.S., but has had annual weekends, (one in the spring and one in fall), where games are televised, including the Las Vegas Sevens International Tournament on NBCSN, which began in 2010 and the International game in Soldier Field in Chicago, Illinois, which began in 2013 (Kocher, 2014). Games are played between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. during the Las Vegas Sevens, which televises about 23 games per year ("Overview," 2017). The games played in Soldier Field are played between 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m., and the time slots are not organized for broadcasting live on Prime Time TV, but are organized so that the teams can play their games during the day. The games are also

available on streaming such as nbcsports.com and youtube.com on the USA Seven's Tournament Youtube page ("Watch," n.d). In print media, there has been coverage in *USA 7s Magazine* (rugby7smagazine.com), Las Vegas Magazine (Keleman, 2017), and Rugby Today Magazine (Clifton, 2017) for the Las Vegas Sevens Tournament.  For the games played in Chicago, there has been coverage in the New York Times (Brown, 2016), Rugby Today (Rugby Today, 2014), Chicago Tribune (Miller 2016), and Chicago Magazine (Pollock, 2014).

**Mainstream Sports and the Use of Legacy Media**

The total worth of the U.S. sporting industry is approximately $213 billion, which is seven times greater than the U.S. movie industry, and two times greater than the U.S. automobile industry (Sowers, 2005). The NFL has broadcasting deals with television networks worth $3.4 billion (Crupi, 2017) and a revenue total of $39.4 billion for rights to broadcast football games from 2014-2022 (Press, 2011). The organization has net revenue that is not shared by the 32 teams of the league worth $9.2 billion (Boudway, 2014). With the current sports marketplace system growing and becoming more competitive, novel sports, such as rugby, struggle to gain access to sport industry money. Additionally, the rules of rugby are complicated and the sport targets only one percent of the U.S. population (Kocher, 2014). Legacy Sport Media (television, radio, and print) in the U.S. started in the 1850s with coverage of horse racing in William Porter's *Spirit of the Times* (Malone, 2016).  In the 1920s, baseball and boxing were popular among news media, and by 1929, one-third of homes in the U.S. had a radio. This increased access to radio broadcasts created a sponsorship opportunity for U.S. sports. Ford Motor Company paid $100,000 to sponsor the World Series on the radio in 1934 (Malone, 2016).

With the help of television, the National Football League (NFL), by 1958, was the most popular spectator sport in the U.S.  NBC, CBS, and ABC made deals with the NFL for $46.5

million for broadcasting rights for the games by 1962 (Malone, 2016). Malone states "Ad dollars essentially promoted and funded the creation of new sports leagues, lengthened schedules, and various championship games" (para.15). In addition to the ad revenue, the format of the NFL using the television medium played into their success by increasing presence and popularity. Former NFL Commissioner, Pete Rozelle, created Monday Night Football in 1970, which dramatically increased the popularity of football on television (Briggs, 2007).

Monday Night Football (MNF) solidified the concept that pro football games were a vital, weekly happening. And this limited exposure — compared to nightly action in the NBA, NHL, and MLB — infused the action with a must-see feel, bumping up the value, and the ad rates." (Briggs, 2007, p.1)

Aside from the use of television, the NFL focused attention on entire teams, rather than on individual players (to divert attention away from high-rate of turnover due to injuries), and made the NFL what it is today (Briggs, 2007). Today, NFL teams are worth $1.04 billion on average or twice as much as the average MLB team, and three times what NBA teams command (Badenhausen, 2016).

Niche sports must achieve mainstream media popularity before they receive funding and broadcasting. Niche sports, such as soccer and lacrosse, have been able to gain popularity within the United States in the past (Greenhalgh et al., 2011). For example, there are now a variety of cable and satellite channels including the Golf Channel, SPEED Network, and the Outdoor Channel. Additionally, there are a variety of print options such as *Inside Lacrosse*, *VeloNews*, *Paddling* , and *Rugby World* (Greenhalgh et al., 2011). Taking into consideration that niche sports have a smaller fan base within the United States, budgets for television and radio broadcasting are small until niche sports get closer to a mainstream sport level of popularity.

Kocher (2014) found "…with the lack of both money and broadcasts, it would appear that rugby will struggle to grow in the United States until these factors can be dealt with" (p. 16).

Within the U.S., there have been some changes within the popularity of certain niche sports such as NASCAR. As mainstream sports, such as baseball and basketball, have seen a decline in popularity, other sports such as NASCAR (a presumed niche sport in studies such as Greenhalgh et al., 2011), slowly increased in TV ratings until 2015 (Brown, 2005; Kocher, 2014; Perez, 2016). NASCAR's ratings decreased by 25 percent in 2016 due to a 90-minute delay of the Spring Cup finale (Perez, 2016). Kocher (2014) states that, "With American football, baseball, basketball, and even NASCAR claiming the most popular rankings in sports in the United States, there is still room for sports fans to learn about other sport, including rugby" (p. 16).

**Social Media Invades Sports**

As the variety of sports expands in the U.S., the types of media outlets sport teams can use to reach audiences varies from legacy media (i.e. print, radio) to social media (i.e. Facebook and Twitter). For example, Phil West, in his book *The United States of Soccer: MLS and the Rise of American Soccer Fandom* (2016) claims "If radio built baseball, and TV built the NFL, we're going to look back (and say) that the internet built [major league soccer] MLS" (p. 220). All club rugby at the D1 level has social media outlets dedicated to dispersing information about the club to the community. Club rugby, as stated in Appendix A, is split into four divisions, D1 being the highest, and D4 being the lowest. The 1.3 million club rugby participants of USA Rugby can utilize their personal and club social media outlets to raise awareness about their clubs to their followers. The success for these other niche sports obtaining legacy media coverage has been due to the use of the Internet and social media (Vann et al., 2015).

Social media can be used to increase awareness of niche sports (Vann et al., 2015). A niche sport would have a specific market (of fans) for teams and marketers alike to focus on. For example, netball, a game much like basketball, was able to raise awareness of the sport and interactions with fans of certain teams through social media coverage during the Australia-New Zealand Championship in 2013 (Vann et al., 2015). The social media site Twitter had an increase in coverage of the championship of netball in Australia, where there was not any television coverage, and more coverage through Twitter in New Zealand where there was television coverage (Vann et al., 2015).

Dixon et al., (2015) found that social media was the most important medium for NCAA marketing officials of intercollegiate sport departments. Furthermore, raising awareness was deemed the most important messaging strategy in using social media. "The research revealed that the utilization of social media to accomplish the organizational purposes of raising awareness and marketing were deemed to be the most important, used most frequently, and were perceived by the respondents to be the most successful" (Dixon et al, 2015, p. 108). Additionally, Dixon found that the two most important messages shared with stakeholders of a sport were from Facebook more often than on Twitter.

The Internet has revolutionized the dissemination of sport information, allowing fans 24/7 access to favorite sport teams, leagues, or players. This, coupled with the amplified use of Twitter and Facebook by many athletes and teams, both mainstream and niche, has created a sporting environment where fans rarely have to search very hard for information regarding favorite sports entities (Greenhalgh et al., 2011). Sports have become more personal, far beyond just the action of a game or match. Greenhalgh et al. (2011) suggest that niche sports looking to

increase the level of spectator support may be well served in using social media outlets to make products more accessible.

**Legacy Media Using Social Media**

To keep up with the immediacy of social media, legacy media outlets have started to use social media (Emmett, 2008).  As Figure 1 points out, there are distinct differences between legacy and social media. Some attributes of social media (i.e. two-way conversation, real-time creating, etc.) result in consumers choosing social media over legacy (Gangadharbatla, Bright, & Logan 2014). Nelson (2013) proposed a list of how legacy media and social media could be used together to relay messages and promote each other. These media outlets should be used together rather than organizations choosing between the two (Nelson, 2013). Legacy uses social media by having stories that continue or are updated through social media. Social media can be used as an outlet for viewers of legacy for comments about stories (Nelson, 2013).

**Figure 2.1: Differences between Social Media and Traditional (legacy) Media**
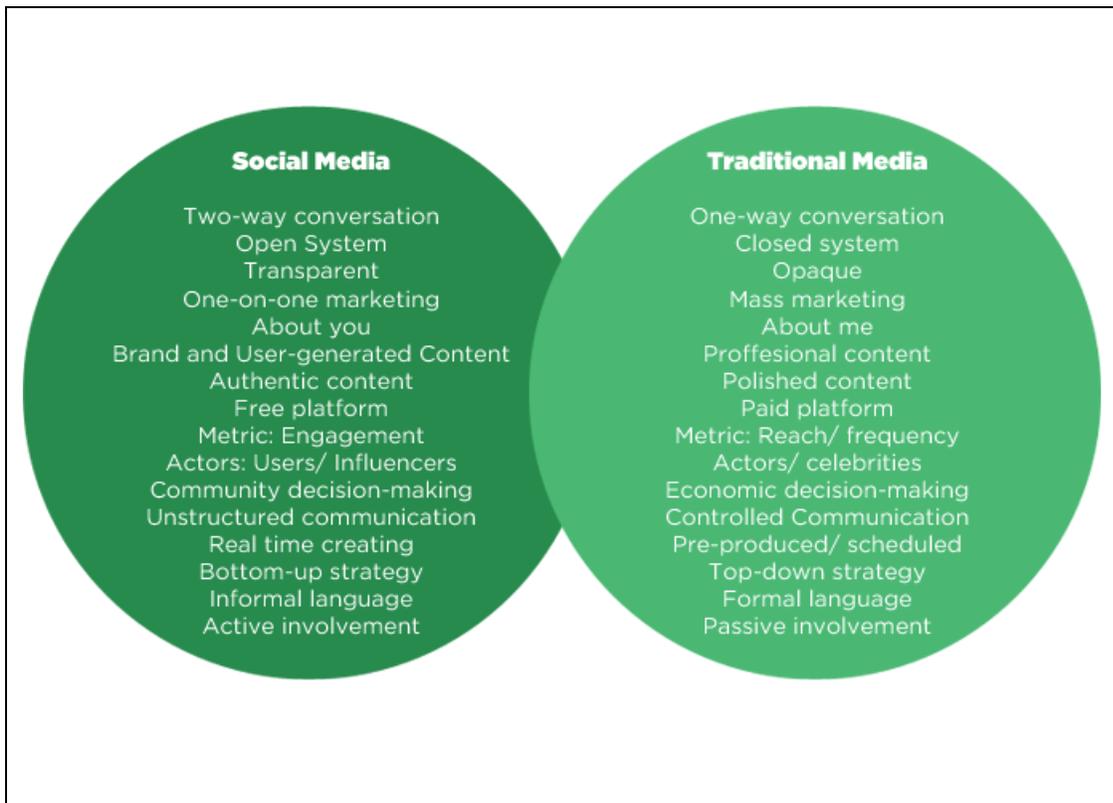


Note. "Social Media vs. Traditional Marketing: Who Wins the Battle in Sport?" By We Play, 2015. Reprinted with permission.

Legacy media and social media working together can be used for social movements and events. Byrne (2015) found that news coverage on legacy media can increase engagement on social media. In 2015, the British general election hoped to obtain more voter participation from voters 18-24 years old, and Byrne (2015) found that 35 percent of voters were influenced to vote a certain way because social media. TV influenced voting decisions by 32 percent and print by 20 percent. A key point from Byrne (2015) was that voters from 18-24 were found to be more responsive when legacy media would interact with them on their "own turf" of social media such as Facebook. Legacy media outlets can now take what they have learned from social media into the next election. Byrne (2015) found "Some media organizations such as the BBC and the

Guardian tried a multiplicity of social media engagement initiatives. Some worked better than others, providing some key learnings for 2020" (p. 44). As social media and legacy media have begun to work in conjunction with one another, niche sports including rugby should be able to use both types of media together to advance the sport in the U.S.

**Social Media and Niche Sports**

Social media could be a key factor in the technology-driven society of the U.S. to raise not only awareness, but also to facilitate the financial gain of niche sports. Crawford (2004) concluded that sport fans are not just passive recipients, but producers who construct and create unique visible and invisible values, such as fantasy games, websites, fanzines, and communication (e.g., talking about sports or sport games with family members and peers). However, differentiation is key in effectively marketing to intended audiences. It is especially important for properties marketing to a smaller segment or niche, which must differentiate its product to appeal to the specific needs of a developing market (Dalgic & Leeuw, 1994; Greenhalgh et al., 2011).

Geurin & Clavio (2015) found that the social media interactions of players of niche sports are different than players of mainstream sports on social media. Firstly, niche sport players were found to have more fan-generated posts on social media pages than mainstream sport players, showing they had not changed the default settings on social media accounts to disable certain posts. The second major finding is that niche sport players had more personal sport-related content posted on their page than the mainstream sport players.  Fans were more engaged in reacting to status updates and pictures by both types of players than videos or links to articles. The third major finding was that fans were just as likely to react to sponsor-related material for the team as non-sponsored material regardless of if the sport was niche or mainstream (Geurin &

Clavio, 2015). **Table 2.1** shows three sports media usage for both legacy and social media in the United States.  The graph illustrates the different types of media used by each type of sport. Mainstream/ All Purpose is represented by American football and the group would include basketball and baseball, as well. Specialized Sports are represented by soccer and would include golf and Olympic Sports. Club sports represented by rugby and would include sports such as lacrosse and cricket.

**Table 2.2 Sports Media Usage Depending on Level of Sport**

| Mainstream/ All Purpose: Football | | Specialized: Soccer | | Niche/ Club: Rugby | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Legacy | Social | Legacy | Social | Legacy | Social |
| **TV**: NBC, CBS, Fox, and ESPN, NFL Network (i.e. NFL Sunday ticket) | Facebook, Twitter, Instagram: Each individual team, nearly all individual players, the NFL itself | **TV**- NBC, NBCSN, USA or CNBC TV- Fox Soccer 2, Fox Soccer Plus, NBCSN, ESPN 3 (all other international soccer) | Facebook, Twitter, Instagram: Each League (professional and international), each team, | **TV**-Fox Soccer 2, Fox Soccer Plus, NBCSN, ESPN 3 **Only international games played by the U.S. Eagles, there is not Professional League | Facebook, Twitter, Instagram: International league and team, each individual player (USA Eagles), Each individual club, USA Rugby Organization |
| **Digital Streaming:** NBC, CBS, Fox, ESPN, NFL Network | | **Digital Streaming:** ESPN 3, Fox Soccer Plus, FuboTV, beIN Sports, Univision, NBC Universal (U.S. and international) | | **Digital Streaming:** Roku, Apple TV, Chromecast, USArugbytv, therugbychannel, NBC Sports | |
| **Radio:** Each team has a station (32), NFL Game Pass, Sirius XM NFL Radio, Westwood One, TuneIn Radio | | **Radio:** ESPN Radio, TuneIn Radio | | **Radio:** TuneIn Radio | |
| **Print:** Sports Illustrated, Sports Weekly, Sports sections of local newspapers | | **Print:** Sports America, World Soccer Annual, Soccer 360 | | **Print:** Rugby World, Rugby Mag, Rugby 7s Magazine, Rugby Today | |

Sports Media Usage Depending on Level of Sport by J. Kucharski (May 5, 2017).

Note. The information in Table 2.1 is a visual depiction of the types of media available to mainstream sports, specialized sports, and niche sports. Soccer in the U.S. was initially within the 'club' segment of sports but with social media, increased in popularity. Football has been the preferred sport on TV since the 1948 (Malone, 2016), and had to adopt social media as time went on.

# Literature Review

Few studies have focused on media and rugby or social media and rugby. Research discussed previously from Geurin & Clavio (2015) explained the differences in how niche sport players and mainstream sport players interact with the public differently on social media. Price, Farrington & Hall (2013) found that the reason mainstream players may not be in contact with followers on social media is because of rules put in place by governing organizations of the sport. The issue stems from the governing body's desire to protect players from harmful messages sent to them individually on social media sites such as Twitter (Price et al., 2015). Less than five percent of British soccer clubs reported having a negative experience from the use of Twitter (Price et al., 2015). Further, Price et al. (2015) found that there were multiple uses for social media for the club, including bypassing external media such as radio and newspapers, bridging the gap between player and supporter of a soccer team, opening the soccer club to a wider audience, reaching a younger demographic directly, attracting social media traffic to the soccer website, and marketing merchandise.

Social media was found to have an impact on how individuals consume news about sports. Price et al. (2015) found that live TV and radio has made print media less timely when it comes to disseminating information and social media has now continued to speed-up the process of updating fans. Among club soccer teams Price et al. (2015) studied, 36 percent believed that live updates for games was the main reason to utilize Twitter. The shift from legacy media was also researched by Thompson et al. (2014). Failure to utilize social media sites, (especially Facebook and Twitter), often risked the loss of new opportunities (e.g. enhanced loyalty, direct communication with fans) and the loss of fans (Thompson et al., 2014).

Thompson et al. (2014) found that sports marketers in niche sports should consider focusing on relationships that can be established through two-way communication on social media to make up for the lack of money from smaller sports. Thompson et al. (2014) also found that using Facebook to create quality content to encourage interaction with fans that commented was the core of interaction on social media. Thompson et al. (2015) claimed that to successfully utilize Facebook to promote fan interaction, it is important to answer comments as soon as possible, offer specific deals to fans via Facebook, post blogs from players, provide content from regional sport organizations with a focus on club or regional events, provide quizzes with prizes provided by sponsors of the club's team, and incentivize fans to get involved on the club's page by posting photos.

When utilized effectively, social media can increase fan interaction. Kocher (2014) found that "…in regard to sports, social media is being used more and more by athletes, teams, and organizations to promote themselves and interact with fans" (p. 23).  Sports teams and sports organizations may share information about their sport or about their sponsors, and may also share non-sport related information to followers about events happening in their area or for entertainment (Geurin & Clavio, 2015). Park et al. (2010) found that one reason individuals use social media is to seek information about sports to satisfy their curiosity. Gibbs, O'Reilly, and Brunette (2014) found four major reasons why individuals follow and interact with sports teams on Twitter: to have interaction with the players and teams, to see promotions for the team, to receive live game updates, and to get news of the team. Social media sites are found to have individuals such as media organizations, teams, and athletes engage audiences, making sports the third most popular topic on Facebook (Boemer, 2015; Matsa & Mitchell, 2014).

Social media sites, such as Twitter, were found to be used significantly more if the user also watched television sports broadcasts (Boehmer, 2015). Individuals obtaining daily news about sports teams chose Facebook, while Twitter was used in periods of time when an event (game, championship, or celebration) was occurring over Facebook (Boehmer, (2015).

**Importance of Structure in Social Media Jobs**

Job descriptions for professions are important for helping organizations legally (while not required), for reducing time for training and hiring, and for giving managers the ability to show employees how to maintain or elevate their position (Rakich, 1972; Marino, 2005; Tyler, 2013). "At its most basic level, preparing job descriptions can help an organization clarify what it really wants to accomplish and how it wants to go about it. At the same time, employees understand what is expected of them" (Marino, 2005, p. 1). Within a job description, there should be standard components including a job title, reporting line (who the employee answers to), main purpose/ task, skills and experience needed for the job, and date in which the job description was made (Marino, 2005).

Borden (2004) examined the importance of target audiences and channels of communication when disseminating information to the public. Target audiences are segmented "To ensure maximum efficiency and effectiveness in the use of scarce resources" (Andreasen, 2002, p. 7; Borden, 2004). This target market can be segmented simply by demographics or psychographics (lifestyle) to better aim the message to the intended audience (Alcaley & Bell, 2000; Borden, 2004). Once the target market (audience) is chosen, the channel of communication chosen is the next important step to reaching your target audience (Borden, 2004).

A strategy in media is a plan to achieve an objective or goal. Within the media market, a strategy is a way of managing all business activities to the service of accomplishing an objective

(Krajcovic, 2015). The process of strategic management is "(1) identification of corporate mission, vision and objectives, (2) analysis of the internal and external environment of the company, (3) formulation of corporate strategy, (4) implementation of the strategy, and (5) evaluation and control of the achieved results" (Krajcovic, 2015, p. 23). It is important to utilize this strategy process in the implementation of any media plan.

**Framing and Social Media**

Framing theory, as defined by Smith (2014), is when "The media choose what to emphasize or exclude, and the manner in which these subjects are portrayed influences the messages received by the audience" (p. 99). With the introduction of social media, there is now a direct connection between organizations and their audiences. Kassing & Sanderson (2010) found the ability to communicate with their audiences helpful for sports after researching the Twitter interactions between players and fans during the Giro, an Italian cycling competition. The cyclists embraced the interaction with their fans through posting videos and pictures and communicating directly with fans, giving information about the race not given to legacy media (Smith, 2014; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010). The interaction resulted in "Cyclists giving fans more insight on the sport in general and the race in specific" (Smith, 2014, p. 101). This is an example of framing theory due to the change in perception of audiences on the sport of cycling. In terms of communication media, it has been shown that the way magazines frame themselves within a market can change their audience's perception.

Organizations using framing theory through social media can be difficult as described by the evaluation done by Kidd (2011) on museums in the U.K. Three different types of frames were identified and evaluated as to how museums had been using social media: marketing, inclusivity, and collaborative.

The marketing frame suggested that organizations create a "face" for their organization through their interaction on social media and result in relationship development and community building. Many organizations strive to create a face through social media tools such as Twitter's hashtags, but Kidd (2011) found that while creating these relationships is important, if no one is searching for the hashtags used by the organization, then the post is not reaching anyone but the current followers.

The second frame examined is inclusivity, or using social media to sustain communities. However, Kidd (2011) found that

> …it is evident that communities do not establish and sustain themselves; just because one has a blog, Facebook page or YouTube channel, it does not necessarily follow that an active, vibrant and ongoing community will dialogue there. Moreover, there is no certainty that this dialog will be sizeable. It has been shown that much of any interaction and exchange that occurs within an online community (and certainly any content creation) will come from a soberingly small segment of potential and actual users". (p. 69)

The key to creating and sustaining these communities is to create many-to-many communication, or having the same messages or voice of an organization, but framing them for multiple groups. The Australian Museum has implemented this strategy successfully because it has blogs for visitors, teachers, youth ambassadors, and editorials (Kidd, 2011).

Lastly, the collaborative frame allows audiences of social media to co-produce content for an organization. While 'crowdsourcing' content by allowing followers of an organization to co-produce content is helpful, organizations have been found to have a difficult time giving the authority of creating content away to followers and truly using 'social media' (Kidd, 2011).

However, the use of social media to create conversation about the content posted by organizations is crucial. Simon (2007) states that "[the] Holy Grail of social discourse [is] where people interact directly with each other around content" (Kidd, 2011, p.77).

**Social Media and Impression Management**

Facebook is one of the most popular social media networks worldwide with 1.86 billion accounts as of March 2017 ("Top 20," 2017). Twitter, on the other hand, only had 317 million active users as of January 2017 (Aslam, 2017). The primary view of the page is the "wall" of the profile. Facebook users can update or change their "status" to tell friends what they are doing or thinking and can view messages left by friends on their wall. Facebook friends can comment on and/or "like" users' status updates and wall posts (Hall, Pennington, & Lueders, 2013).

The profile on a social media network provides the opportunity to display personality and emphasize traits that are believed to be desirable to a users' audience. The profile contains a variety of cues that can be used to ascertain the sports social media personality (Hall et al., 2013).

With the creation of a social media identity comes the need to continue to consistently sustain the identity for the viewers of the profile. In creating and maintaining a profile, users engage in online impression management, wherein one "actively engages in creating, maintaining, and modifying an image that reflects one's ideal self" (Gonzales & Hancock, 2008 p.168; Hall, et al., 2013). The previous research done on social media identity and impression management is largely based in the construction in an individual's personal profile and how one can use his or her profile to create an online personality. Gosling, Augustine, Vazire, Holtzman, & Gaddis, (2011) found that the ability for the public to understand personality occurs through the content of the users' posts.

A study done by Carah (2015) examined how organizations used social media campaigns to promote interaction with the brand. Danish brewer Carlsberg created a campaign asking customers to upload pictures of themselves drinking beer to Carlsberg's social media outlet Instagram. The campaign was designed so that as long as pictures of customers drinking Carlsberg beer continued to be uploaded, the beer would remain at a cheap price. The thought was that if individuals would share photos of themselves on social media out drinking beer, it would show the individual's friends that they were out at bars to entice them to join as well (Carah, 2015). Brands have been able to create value when they enable consumers of the brand to be seen and felt in the social world. These brands enable consumers when they orchestrate actions, generate data, and flow attention to events (Carah, 2015, p. 4).

Having a social media following can encourage followers to purchase brand items in the future. Nisar & Whitehead (2016) found that individuals were prone to follow brands that they liked. They also found that the individuals who followed brands on social media were more likely to purchase goods and services of that brand in the future (Nisar & Whitehead, 2016). Consumers are more likely to trust information on social media if the source is from a brand's official profile (Nisar & Whitehead, 2016).

This study examines how an organization, namely the niche sport of club-level rugby teams, uses its social media site, (Facebook) to interact with its own social media fan base. Within the context of rugby clubs, this study explores how the social media officials of D1 Midwestern club-level rugby clubs have used social media strategies to grow their rugby fan base. The main research questions are:

- o What is the role social media plays in the growth of club-level rugby?
- o What is the background (education or training) of social media chairs for U.S.

club-level rugby?

- o What social media outlets do social media chairs of U.S. club-level rugby effectively use?

- o What strategies of mass communication do U.S. club level social media chairs use?

# Method

A qualitative approach will be used for this research.   In-depth interviews will be conducted with the social media chairs of five Division-one club-level men's rugby teams: the Kansas City Blues, Chicago Griffins, Chicago Lions, Palmer College Rugby, and Milwaukee Barbarians. Furthermore, these specific five club teams also have been able to demonstrate the ability to increase attendance at their games and events. Each one of these teams has a team following spanning from 1,400 likes (Chicago Gryphons) to 4,500 likes (Kansas City Blues). While the followers of these Midwestern teams do not seem to be very large, they are much larger than other teams around the country such as the East Palo Alto Razor Backs (99 likes) or even other teams in their division like the Cincinnati Wolfhounds (699 likes).  The social media following of the professional league, regardless of the relationship between PRO and USA Rugby, has gotten more Facebook followers than all other Men's club D1 teams. I chose PRO because of their heightened social media following and PRO is the closest professional league to come into existence in the U.S. I have chosen these social media strategists from PRO because I could get in contact with them through a mutual acquaintance for convenience.

In-depth interviews will be used to discover rich data in the interviewees' own words. The open-ended format of in-depth interviews allows for more elaboration than surveys and will allow for interviewees to explain their answers to this study's questions in detail and answer in their own words. Boyce and Neale (2006) found "Interviews are often used to provide context to other data (such as outcome data), offering a more complete picture of what happened in the program and why" (p.3).  The information obtained from this study will not be generalizable because this is not a random sample of U.S. rugby teams, because the samples chosen were due to their high number of social media followers.  The sample was also chosen out of convenience.

This is an opportunity for researchers to understand what designated individuals who plan and manage the social media accounts are doing to raise awareness. The information collected through in-depth interviews will give researchers insight as to what social media strategies are being used within their organization rather than using tools such as a survey which would only give insight on the direct questions asked. The in-depth interviews give the subjects in this study the ability to answer the questions in the interview along with the ability to expand on why they took the actions on social media and how they made decided on those actions in their own words.

In-depth interviews were chosen because there is little data on how and why rugby teams use social media. In-depth interviews were chosen to add a base of information for quantitative research to be conducted in the future. Additionally, the in-depth interviews will also be conducted to better understand the social media strategies and channels used by PRO. This professional organization was in the process of being created and games were played, but unfortunately were unable to continue. The PRO league began and had a set of five teams, but after disputes with USA Rugby was not able to continue. The interview questions will reveal how the league conducted its social media.

The interviews will be conducted via email. One reason for making the choice the interviews over email is that it will eliminate the boundaries of time (Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015). With interview subjects being rugby players who are not being paid to play rugby, that means that they will potentially have full time jobs on top of playing rugby, restricting their ability to schedule an appointment for an interview. Additionally, this will promote participants' finding a time and place of their choice to complete the questions instead of having to find time to fill out the interview. The most important reason for using email interviews rather than phone or Skype interviews is that it encourages reflection throughout the

interview process. Some of the questions may require extensive reflection in which the participant may have to think back to months of social media work, which may not be viable when restricting the participants to a specific time to communicate (Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015).

Another advantage to using email over a phone call for conducting in-depth interviews is the ability to review the answers from interviews and follow up with probing questions. These questions can create additional content that may not be present from only one interview. It gives the interviewer the ability to also look at the entire pool of content from all of the answers and create a second round of questions built upon the existing content. However, due to the time restraint of this study, no secondary interviews were conducted.

The first section of questions will be understanding the background of the club's social media, social media chair position, the individual who currently occupies that chair, and what the social media chairs want to accomplish within the social media chair position. The second section will be to understand what strategies are being used on U.S. rugby social media on Facebook and why the social media chairs chose those specific strategies.

The reason for this research is to understand what type of strategies, if any, are being used on social media to increase awareness of the sport of rugby in the U.S. Social media is the one of the main media used by sports at the club-level due to its low cost and the ability to create and interact with fans (Kocher, 2014). The hope is that this study will result in finding certain strategies that have been positive for the club teams.

Information obtained about the social media posts opens the possibilities of future research for other niche sports attempting to emerge in the U.S. Emerging niche sports in the U.S. with a small number of following include cricket, soccer, and lacrosse (Greenhalgh et al.,

2011).  The study also would identify the different ways that social media chairs create a social media identity through the in-depth interviews and decide which parts of the identity they have created that would be a viable option to make a model for other club-level tiered sports in the U.S. The proposed model could also show emerging niche sports organizations what type of frame (building awareness, raising funds, building loyalty) they should be focusing on improving.


**Interview Questions for Section One: Men's Club Teams**

*What is your name and title of your team?*

*Do you have a background in mass communication?*

*When did your rugby team start?*

*Would you say that the history of your team is something that you wish to be public knowledge?*

This section of questions will be asked to identify if the person in charge of social media are educated in mass communication and in the history of the club teams. The importance for education in mass communication is to see if the person in charge of social media understands the strategies in mass communication and how to use those strategies.  The questions pertaining to the club rugby history is to see if the club social media chairs understand where the club teams came from, and use that to promote the club for possible promotions to retired rugby players.

*What are some of the biggest events (community outreach, tournaments) do your team participate in?*

*What types of promotions do you perform for your team?*

*What type of social media do you primarily use to inform your fan base?*

*Would you say this is the most effective way to reach your fans?*

These questions will be asked to understand the duties of the social media chairs. The biggest events question will be asked to see what types of promotional events occur off of social media that the social media chairs may be able to promote online. The question pertaining about primarily use to inform fan bases is to understand the most used social media platforms by club teams. The question pertaining to the perception of the most effective platform is to understand what makes the social media chairs choose the primary media to reach the club's fan base.

*What type of progress have you seen from utilizing social media (specifically Facebook) in reaching your audience?*

*What type of promotion do you want to work on to elevate the awareness and fan base of your team?*

*Do you have any goals through social media or otherwise for your team's growth?*

These three questions will be asked to understand what the social media chairs progress on social media and their goals for social media growth. The first of these questions pertains to progress in social media use, in specifics to Facebook to identify what the club has received in terms of social media from the chair's efforts. The second question is to understand where the social media chairs would like to work on in the future. The question about goals through social media is to hopefully explain where the social media chairs are striving to get to for the team's growth.

## Interview Questions for Section Two: Men's Club Teams

*What are your routine duties in terms of promoting the team?*

*What are your duties specifically for social media?*

*What social media outlets do you use?*

The question pertaining to routine duties is to understand the day-to-day operations in general for the person in charge of social media for each club team on and off social media. This

could be traditional media use, community partnerships, or events. The question about duties

specifically for social media will be asked to see the uses of social media each social media chair

would execute.  Which social media outlets are being used will be asked to see how many social

media outlets are used to promote the clubs.

*Which type of social media posts do you rely on most for Facebook?*

*Which type of social media posts do you rely on most for Twitter?*

*Which type of social media posts seem to be the most popular/ effective?*

*In what way do you promote people interacting with your site (e.g. posting pictures of*

*themselves, sharing your posts, engaging in conversation)?*

The questions above will be asked to break down the types of social media posts are used

on each social media outlet.  The posts on social media can have a large range.  The club teams

could be posting information about the team in general, about an event or game, pictures, videos,

and news about rugby in general.  There could be different content depending on the social

media outlet.  The question about popularity or effectiveness is to see which type of post is

getting to most attention through likes and shares.  The question about interacting with people on

social media is to see how the social media chairs interact with their social media followers.

*How many people follow your page?*

*Do you have a target audience?*

*If so, what is it?*

*What are your strategies for reaching these audiences?*

*What made you decide on those strategies?*

The question of number of followers will be asked to gauge the reach each club has on

social media.  The questions pertaining to target audiences are to see if the club teams are trying

to reach a certain demographic.  The follow-up question about what the target audience is will be asked to see how specific the target audience has been defined by the social media chairs.  The strategies for reaching the targets and the decision of those strategies will be asked to see what the social media chairs will do to reach target audiences and how the chairs came to that decision.

*Do you have any partnerships with either businesses or other organizations to spread your awareness?*

*Have you made any attempts for reaching out for televised media? If so, was it acquired?*

The question about partnerships will be asked to identify if the clubs are working with a partner or sponsor.  This would mean the club teams would be getting support from an outside source, which may change either the club's finances or events promoted on social media.  The question about televised media is to see if the clubs were attempting to use traditional media.  This would be in addition to the social media use done by the clubs.  The question if the clubs acquired television coverage will be asked to see if any efforts in getting television media were successful.


## Interview Questions Section One: PRO League

*What is your name and Title?*

*How did your league start?*

*How did you get involved with rugby?*

*How were the decisions made to choose the cities in which your teams were designated?*

These questions will be asked to get a better understanding about the league itself.  The way the social media chair got involved in rugby is to understand how or if the social media

chair is educated in rugby terms and rules of the game.  The question pertaining to decisions on

the cities is to understand why the league chose which cities to station the PRO rugby teams.

This will be asked to identify if media following of rugby had any weight on their decision.

*What were your organization's goals to reaching audiences or building awareness to people*

*about your league/ team?*

*Was your focus on rugby or non-rugby aware audiences?*

*Was there a specific target audience or demographic you wanted to reach?*

*What is your background in mass communications?*

The question on organizational goals is to understand how PRO is reaching their

audiences on and off the field.  The rugby or non-rugby question will be asked to identify if PRO

will be looking for awareness of people who already know of rugby, or if they are trying to target

people to follow the sport that are not a part of the rugby community.  The target audience

question is to understand who specifically PRO would like to reach with promotional

information.  The question on mass communication background will be to understand the

education of the social media chair of PRO and if they have experience with mass

communication strategies.

*What issues have arisen that you have seen in terms of your organizations success? (e.g. What*

*hurdles have you found in attempting to reach your goals?*

*Were the decisions on the strategy for mass communication done by a group or an individual?*

Issues that have arisen was asked about to see if there has been anything stopping PRO

rugby from growing as an organization.  I left this question ambiguous to see if there were any

types of issues that may not have been covered in the literature review.  The question on strategy

will be asked to understand if this was a decision by the person in charge of social media or if it

was a group.  This would be important to find out if the one posting the social media was deciding on the decisions on social media strategies or if the heads of the organization did the decision.


 **Interview Questions Section Two: NRFL & PRO League/ Teams**

*Was your strategy for utilizing social media different than legacy medias? (Connecting with audiences, speed of updates, etc.)*

*Which social media outlet did you utilize the most?*

*What types of posts (updates of games, player profiles, community outreach) were used the most?*

*Why were these types of posts chosen?*

The question pertaining to the difference in legacy media use and social media use is to identify if PRO are using them together or separately.  Additionally, the question will be asked to understand if there were different reasons for using different types of media.  The question about social media outlets is to understand which social media outlet is used to reach audiences the most.  The types of posts will be asked about to see what type of post on social media have been used the most and what they were.

*Is there anything that you would have liked to change about your approach of legacy media?*

*Is there anything you would like to see from lower levels of rugby in terms of media coverage or usage?*

*Is there any advice you would like to give people that are designated social media officials of lower levels of rugby?*

*Which medium do you see rugby finding the most expansion?*

*Are there other countries that you have seen expand rugby in the way the U.S. is attempting? If so, is there anything that you believe your organization can learn from to help with the expansion of rugby in the U.S.?*

With the knowledge that PRO has been disbanded, the question will be asked if there was a different approach to using legacy media if the social media chair could change. As a professional social media chair, the question about lower level rugby media usage was to see if there was anything the social media chair for PRO has seen that should be changed. The following question about advice for lower levels of rugby was to see if there would be any recommendations someone that has worked for a professional league could give, as it is the highest level of social media usage rugby has in the U.S. The question pertaining to the medium of expansion for rugby was to gauge the thoughts of the PRO social media official as to which medium is the most important for rugby in the future. The final question about other countries is to see if anything U.S. rugby could learn from countries where rugby is more established.

**Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis was chosen to analyze the data from the proposed study. "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail," (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.79). Theoretical analysis can be used to analyze data of patterns that are socially produced and can be used with other theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clark, 2006).

The patterns are called themes and can have three defining to be recognized in a set of data. Themes can be recognized through reoccurring information, if the theme has a substantial impact on the data, and if the theme can be reducible (Manoliu, 2015). However, Braun & Clark

(2006) found that a high frequency of patterns does not necessarily mean the theme itself is more crucial. Braun & Clark (2006) found that "there is no hard-and-fast answer to the question of what proportion of your data set needs to display evidence of the theme for it to be considered a theme " (p.82).  A rich description is important of the reader to get a sense of the important themes. Through the rich description, the themes are identified, coded, and analyzed to give an accurate reflection of the content of the entire data set (Braun & Clark, 2006).   The steps to forming a thematic analysis can be found in Table 3.1:

**Table 3.1: Steps to Conducting Thematic Analysis**

| Phase | Description of the process |
|---|---|
| 1. Familiarizing yourself with your data: | Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas. |
| 2. Generating initial codes: | Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code. |
| 3. Searching for themes: | Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. |
| 4. Reviewing themes: | Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis. |
| 5. Defining and naming themes: | Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme. |
| 6. Producing the report: | The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis. |

Note: Reprinted from "Using Thematic Analysis in psychology" by Braun & Clark, 2006.  Reprinted with permission.


## Best Practices for Business Social Media: Relation to Rugby Social Media

The questions proposed in this study required a model of best practices to base my research questions on in terms of what constitutes a social media post effectiveness.  The best practices model chosen to compare the results of the current study will be Castonovo & Hueng because the model proposed is for organizations and businesses that are smaller to medium-sized firms.  Rugby is a sport governed by an organization and through merchandise sales and match attendance, it does bring in revenue, much like a business would that provides services.  If legacy

sports were to be considered larger firms, niche sports (including rugby) would fall into the small to medium-sized category.  Castonovo & Hueng (2012) also found the use of social media is the more cost-effective and efficient form of communication for small to medium-sized organizations which mirror what was said in other studies about niche sports (Greenhalgh et al., 2011; Kocher, 2014; Vann et al., 2014; Thompson et al. 2015).

Castonovo & Hueng (2012) explain the model of best practices within customer relationship management.  The two components that make up the model are word-of-mouth and social media strategies.  The model begins with word-of-mouth as a foundation, creating positive communication targeted at the audience to entice them to relay the messages to others (Castronovo & Hueng 2012).  This word-of-mouth does not necessarily mean through vocal communication, but from sharing information from the original source to spread the messages of the organization.  Social media is the vehicle in which the relationship management of electronic word-of-mouth occurs (Kozinets, de Valck,, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010; Castronovo & Hueng 2012).  Within the current study, this would mean that the club-level rugby clubs would be able to measure their word-of-mouth through the number of times posts were shared by their followers.

The vehicle of social media used by professional rugby and club rugby is a focal point for this current study.  Castonovo & Huang (2012) highlight the marketing benefits for major social media sites and how they can be used as tools to communicate to audiences for different reasons.  An organization using social media will be able to strive for three types of goals: building awareness, increased sales, and building loyalty (Castonovo & Huang, 2012).  The choice of medium should reflect the types of goals the goals and organization is attempting to achieve.  For instance, Castonovo & Huang (2012) found

"Facebook and Twitter are effective ways to engage consumers in conversation. All social media formats have the potential to convert consumers into loyal customers by connecting with consumers on a one-to-one level and cultivating meaningful relationships with them" (p. 126). The goal of building awareness will mean that an organization should emphasize guerilla marketing (the use of multiple internet outlets such as blogs to feed individuals to the social media hub), search engine optimization (the use of keywords to increase the placement of a site to show up first in an Internet search), and event-based marketing (holding events to obtain stakeholders in an organization's contact information for future use) (Castronovo & Hueng, 2012). The goal of increasing sales will mean the organization will need an emphasis on relationship marketing, or building strong relationships with the customers, stakeholders, or in the case of rugby, fans. The goal of building loyalty will mean the organization should have an emphasis on relationship building, building a community around the brand, and viral marketing. Viral marketing is marketing content that is rapidly disseminated and transferred among individuals and groups of individuals, exponentially increasing consumer exposure to and engagement with content (Castronovo & Hueng, 2012). In the instance of rugby, the goals that should be focused on are building awareness and increasing sales. Castonovo & Huang (2012) found "The model is one of a synergistic nature, meaning that for its effectiveness to be optimized, all components (goals) must work together and feed into one another to communicate the overarching message to all stakeholders," (p. 127).

This model will be used to categorize some of the information given from the interviews as this area of niche sports do not currently have a best practices policy put into place for social media strategies. Per Castronova & Huang's (2012) model, rugby should be focused mainly on building awareness and increasing sales. Measuring the posts word-of-mouth through looking at

40

the amount of sharing per post.  This would include sharing on Facebook and retweeting on Twitter.

**Best Practices in Mainstream Sports: Relation to Rugby Social Media**

Wysocki (2012) created a model of best practices of social media for the NBA.  Wysocki conducted in-depth interviews of nine NBA social media strategists to understand the best practices of the sport in terms of relationship management theory.  Wysocki (2012) found that eight practices should be used to optimize relationships between the NBA and their stakeholders and fans: give quality content, incorporate social media offline, gamify social media efforts, personalize fans on social media, collect fan data, fansource/crowdsource, use fans to amplify message, and track, measure, analyze and adjust.

The first of Wysocki's findings was to give quality content.  Whether it be textual, pictures, a video, or links to external websites and articles. Another type of quality content would be the personalization of fans on social media (Wysocki, 2012) in the form of being authentic, responding to inquiries and issues in a timely manner, and maintaining communication is important to sustain fan relationships.   Wysocki (2012) explains quality content further by explaining it should be exclusive and contain a call to action. Along with using quality links and external websites, the second recommendation from Wysocki (2012) is to use social media links, hashtags, and Twitter handles in advertisements offline at events to allow for people to allow event goers to continue the conversation on or offline.

Fansourcing, or crowdsourcing, allows fans the ability to have input on moderately important decisions within a team's organization give fans a voice within the decision-making process, and closely connects them with teams and players (Wysocki, 2012, p.26).  A way to use fan content through crowdsourcing is to 'gamify' social media efforts (Wysocki, 2012).  By

creating a competitive game to social media, organizations will be able to give fans another way to join in the conversation and can be incentivized to participate. Another way to use fans to create or spread content is to use fans to amplify messages. By sharing a team's posts on the fan's personal social media will increase fan base, fan interactions, brand impressions, and social media awareness for the team (Wysocki, 2012, ).

Track, measure, analyze, and adjusting social media is considered imperative by Wysocki (2012, p. 27). By measuring the social media posts and finding patterns in content, a social media strategist can find the optimal time to post, most popular type of post and most influential fans. This allows for the user of social media to provide the the fans the most engaging experience (Wysocki, 2012). A component of tracking and measuring fans is collecting fan data, which can come in the form of addresses, emails, phone numbers to be organized into a database (Wysocki, 2012). This helps organizations, such as the NBA (Wysock, 2012), market merchandise to offline audiences and identify key demographics.

**Putting it all together: Social Media Best Practices Guidelines for Rugby**

Castronova (2012) has a foundation that can be used for any medium or small-sized business that is attempting to merge into any market, but does not have anything within the study to relate to sports. Wysocki (2012) is completely focused on the sports market, but used basketball as the context of his study, a sport that has already been established as a mainstream sport. This study combines the two frameworks to make the Wysocki (2012) best practices work as tactics to achieve the goals and strategies set out in the Castonovo & Huang (2012) foundation. The Wysocki best practices are closely related within the related metrics laid out in

Castonovo & Huang's Table 4.  This study's layout will be done in the design of **Table 3.2**

found below:

**Table 3.2 U.S. Rugby Social Media Best Practices Model**

| Castonovo & Huang (2012) | | Wysocki (2012) |
|---|---|---|
| <u>Goals</u> | <u>Related Metrics</u> | <u>Best Practices</u> |
| Building Awareness | • Web traffic and web traffic referrals<br>• Search volume trends and volume of followers<br>• Social mentions<br>• Share of voice | • Give quality content<br>• Incorporate social media offline<br>• Gamify social media efforts<br>• Fansource/Crowdsource<br>• Use fans to amplify message<br>• Track, measure, adjust |
| Increase Sales | • Web traffic and time spent on site<br>• Bounce rate and content acceptance rate<br>• Repeat visits and volume of followers<br>• Social mentions<br>• Share of voice | • Give quality content<br>• Gamify social media efforts<br>• Collect fan data<br>• Use fans to amplify message<br>• Track, measure, and adjust |
| Building Loyalty | • Time spent on site<br>• Repeat visits and volume of followers Content acceptance rate<br>• Repeated social mentions<br>• Share of voice<br>• Recommendations and reviews<br>• Social connectivity among purchasers | • Give quality content<br>• Gamify social media efforts<br>• Personalize fans<br>• Collect fan data<br>• Fansource/Crowdsource<br>• Track, measure, and adjust |

Note. Goals and related metrics from Castronovo & Huang (2012), Best Practices from Wysocki (2012).

# Results

The in-depth interview questions were conducted over email and were collected from five club level social media chairs along with one representative from the PRO League. The five club teams were from Palmer College Dragons, Chicago Lions, Chicago Griffins, Kansas City Blues, and the Milwaukee Barbarians. The types of questions asked fall into three categories; background and position breakdown, social media chair's strategies and planning, and outcomes of the use of social media to help advance rugby as a sport.

The first category explored the background of the social media chairs in terms of the formal education or training the chairs received, the job structure of being a social media chair, and the routine duties tasked to each person in each respective club rugby team. The second category focused on the targets of the social media chair's efforts, what outlets were used to reach those targets, and what types of posts and interaction was done to connect with the target audiences. The last category explains the outcomes of the efforts on social media from the chairs, the promotional events the social media chairs executed off of or in conjunction with social media efforts, and the goals for the future of the chairs interviewed.

## Background and Position Breakdown

### Education and Training

The level of training and/or education in mass communication varied between all interviewed social media chairs. The level of training or education in mass communication factors into creating a target audiences due to that training giving social media chairs guidelines on how to create a target. Four of the five (Palmer, Lions, Griffons, and Barbarians) did not have formal mass communication training prior to conducting social media duties for rugby teams. The Kansas City Blues social media chair had a minor in Marketing and conducted his

own social media for his business. The PRO League social media chair had a major in Communications from Pennsylvania State University.

**Job Structure**

When asked about the structure of the social media chair duties, the Barbarians described the role as 'undefined.' To begin, only two of the individuals, the ones from the Lions and Blues, shared the same title of Head of Social Media. Other titles were Head Coach (Palmer), Vice President (Griffins), and President and IT Manager (Barbarians). From the PRO League, the interviewed individual's title was Assistant of Media Relations.

**Day to Day Tasks**

While posting was a duty present in all answers given from the interviewed chairs, what each social media chair was posting differed in some respects. In regards to how all chairs were the same, all chairs reported to post game schedules, pictures, videos, and scores. The Blues social media chair seemed to have the most robust amount of duties tasked to his position:

Updating and engaging fans in social media. Creating and providing professional graphics leading up to events (match day programs & rosters, etc.) For our larger events such as playoff matches our the Heartland 7's National Qualifier Tournament or the River of Refuge camping event we will engage local news outlets and do interviews, etc. promoting these events. We also put out weekly highlights of our matches during the week following the match. This helps keep our fans that may not be in the Kansas City area engaged with how we are doing, [and] which players are excelling.

Some of the duties did not consist of operating on social media but were complimentary to social media efforts such as the Barbarians sending postcards and utilizing mailing lists to distribute information about the team, as did the Griffins social media chair. Both the Lions and

the Barbarians and the Lions were tasked in promoting off-field activities and fundraisers in addition to the Blues, with the Barbarians going as far as paying for Facebook Ads to gain awareness.  The Barbarians also promoted the players by posting player profiles,

## Social Media Chair's Strategies and Planning

**Targeting Audiences**

In terms of choosing a target audience for the team's social media efforts, there were multiple ways to target and define an audience. The Palmer club expressed that the messages from the club were for anyone who wanted to listen and the Lions social media chair said the social media efforts of the club team did not have a target audience at all. The PRO team focused on mainly rugby communities and then spread efforts to non-rugby communities as the league grew in popularity.   There were however, some common themes between some of the answers. The Griffins social media chair stated the club focused on old boys from the team and sponsors, along with high school or college aged athletes looking to continuing a rugby career.  The Blues social media chair also focused on alumni and high school and college athletes, with a recent focus on the non-rugby community as well.  Lastly, the Barbarians had the most defined target audience, targeting males, 21-30, living in the greater metro area, rugby, with prior basketball or football experience.

Other target audiences for some of the teams would be the sponsors and partners of the teams that may support them financially.  While two of the five (Palmer and Lions) did not have sponsors, the remaining club teams did have sponsors (Griffins, Blues, Barbarians).  The Griffins, had the gym they train at, two companies (Athletico and Founders) as sponsors and partnered with several high school and youth organizations.  The Blues has a category system to the club's sponsors:

We do have sponsors on 4 different levels (Platinum, Gold, Silver & Bronze) and we try

to deliver a return of investment for these local businesses that sponsor us. We are also an

affiliate member of the Sporting Club Network and have an active relationship with

Sporting Kansas City and we sometimes use their Sporting Network social media to

promote our larger events.

One aspect of the teams that the social media chairs all agreed upon was the fact they all want to

make the history of each of the clubs known to the public.  One way of doing that has been

through celebrations and alumni outreach.  The Kansas City Blues achieved this through social

media but also through alumni events such as the big 50th anniversary push 2016. The Blues

made a film honoring and documenting the club's history and unveiling the film at the 50th

anniversary celebration at the Arrowhead Pavilion. The team also sent a special group of alumni

as well as the current team to celebrate the Blues 50th anniversary in Aspen in Fall of 2016 at the

annual Aspen Ruggerfest as an annual tradition for the club. The Blues have over 1,500 players

in 50 years of existence and have made efforts to update records of alumni and engage alumni on

social media.

**Social Media Outlets Used to Reach Audiences**

A large portion of this study was the different choices in social media platforms and posts

that people in charge of club level rugby social media and professional league rugby social

media use.  All social media chairs interviewed used the social media platform Facebook.  The

Griffin's social media chair even went as far to say:

From what I can tell it is the easiest, most user friendly, and interactive way for us to

communicate with our fans.

The social media chairs from the from Palmer and Chicago Lions echoed these comments and it is the quickest way to interact with fans due to the fact so many people use their phones to interact on social media. Other social media chairs such as the Kansas City Blues did agree that Facebook was the most effective platform, but for different reasons, stating that it was purely because of the established following the team already and the ability to stream games.

Along with the use of Facebook, Twitter was also an outlet used by all interviewed social media chairs as a primary outlet with the exception of Palmer College. Twitter's primary function for all social media chairs using Twitter was to post live score and game updates. This outlet was chosen due to the ability to give quick and easy updates to supporters.

Further, the Lions and the Griffins social media chairs used the social media outlet, Instagram. The Milwaukee Barbarians, used Facebook in conjunction with email the most due to the ability to track emails being opened. The social media chairs outlets used to promote rugby clubs are the same as the social media outlets the chairs use in their personal lives. Table 4.1lists the numbers of followers of each interviewed club or PRO League Social media profile by outlet:

**Table 4.1 Followers on Social media by Outlet**

|          | Facebook | Twitter | Instagram |
|----------|----------|---------|-----------|
| **Palmer** | 3,340 | N/A | N/A |
| **Lions** | 2,490 | 1,423 | 712 |
| **Griffins** | 1,079 | N/A | N/A |
| **Blues** | <4500 | >1700 | N/A |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Barbarians** | 1,500 | N/A | N/A |
| **PRO League** | 36,000 | 7,500 | N/A |

Table 4.1 Club Level and PRO League Standings on social media platforms

**Social Media Strategies**

The social media chairs interviewed had more of a direction in what they wanted than a certain strategy.  Increased engagement was a strategy, with the Lions, Blues, Barbarians, and Griffins expressing that the club would like to increase engagement on their Facebook especially.

As of now it is Facebook for us simply because we by far have the most followers in this

and also their "Facebook Live" feature allows us to stream certain matches to our fans

The Lions social media chair added that they had no other strategy than to increase engagement for sponsors.  Palmer's strategy was to highlight the team, promote the culture of rugby at Palmer, and to use Facebook Ads to raise awareness that scholarships were available to players.  The PRO league social media chair expressed the only strategy was to post frequently to keep audiences updated.

In terms of choosing these strategies for each of the respective clubs, there were very different answers.  Palmer chose the social media strategy from what had worked in the past along with personal experience. The Lions and Barbarians social media chairs chose the strategies based on the need for a desire to recruit and engage audiences.  The Griffins social media chair chose the team's social media strategy from general webinars and articles on digital and social media marketing.  The PRO League chose the strategy for the PRO League through group discussion.

Each social media chair had different strategies in how to interact with their audience, attempting to create two-way communication.  For Palmer and the Barbarians, sharing

posts and getting the club's posts shared were how that communication was achieved. The Lions also measured interaction through sharing along with timely responses to inquiries. The Blues would use Facebook Ads to promote merchandise giveaways. Followers would be able to caption pictures posted to the Blue's club page for a chance to win merchandise. The Griffins partnered with a photographer who would take photos of players and fans alike at games which audiences would be able to tag themselves in the posted photos, which would in turn share the photos between club and fan profiles.

In terms of the posts that were the most effective or popular (the posts with the most engagement from audiences through shares, likes, and comments), were found to all have a visual aspect according to all interviewed social media chairs. The Lions, Palmer, Blues and the PRO League explain that photos or videos are the most effective type of post. While the Lions express that the most popular post is on the social media outlet, Instagram, the Griffins social media chair cited Facebook as the outlet the club obtains the most engagement.

**Outcomes of the Use of Social Media to Help Advance Rugby as a Sport**

**Results from Social Media Efforts**

The social media chairs have been able to evaluate the outcomes of the use of social media. Palmer has been able to see great progress with growing "likes" each year and have gone as far as promote their page through Facebook Ads to promote their page to potential students and players. The Lions were found to have new found support from the social media efforts through Facebook and Twitter.

[We have received]An increased engagement from supporters, interestingly enough, reliance from national rugby media outlets – as well as Midwest & USA Rugby, the

regional and national governing bodies for the sport – on results and box scores from

games, increased followers across both of the aforementioned platforms.

Barbarians credited their sold out games and increased engagement to the social media efforts of

the team.  The Griffins saw similar progress like the Barbarians in terms of game information

communication and also obtained more engagement from alumni which had been difficult

previously. The Blues have found massive progress in interaction and engagement from not only

alumni but in match attendance.  Within the 11 years the Blues social media chair has been with

the club, there has been a 300 percent increase of gate attendance, averaging 500-1000 fans per

game, and getting up to 2,000 on heavily promoted games.

**Promotional Events**

One way that these club level rugby clubs advance the sport of rugby is through hosting

events.  Palmer hosts a weekend double-header game to invite back alumni and players alike to

help new players and help recruit new players.  The majority of the club-level organizations

interviewed, many of these events were charitable in some way.  The Griffins, while

participating in many youth, high school, and college rugby clinics, also host a variety of

fundraisers for charitable organizations.  The Lions host events such as Christmas in the Wards,

which supports Chicago Hope Academy football as a community outreach effort.  Aside from

community outreach, the Lion's social media chair promotes the club's participation in high

profile 15s and sevens matches including the Las Vegas Invitational and the USA Club Rugby

7's National Championship Tournament.  These events have been promoted through social

media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and the use of Email distribution.  Similarly,

the Barbarians use Facebook and email distributions to promote the Barbarian's hosting the

largest summer rugby event in the country with over 125 teams in attendance.

The Kansas City Blues have an extensive off social media events list.

On the field, each year we host the Heartland 7's National Qualifier Tournament at Swope Park at the Children's Mercy Championship Field. We host 8 teams from all over the region (Denver, Salt Lake City, Omaha, St. Louis, Tulsa, New Mexico) as well as other ancillary brackets with varying levels of competition. This is a large scale event with hundreds of athletes participating and over a thousand attendees. The event requires sponsorship, sponsor hotels, setting up and working the gate for admission to sell tickets [and] full concessions. We promote the event on social media using primarily Facebook (we have almost 5,000 followers on Facebook) and Twitter (almost 1,700 followers) as well as through our email distribution lists and alumni group on Facebook.  The Kansas City Blues off the field, the team hosts an annual Christmas philanthropic event in conjunction with St. Thomas Aquinas Rugby. In this event, the team adopts 7-10 less fortunate families for a total of around 35-50 people each year. The even includes adopting the families, donating money, helping collect donations, shopping for gifts, wrapping all the gifts, and then coordinating all the gift delivery the Saturday before Christmas. The Blues typically promote this Christmas Event via social media as well as the club's website.

Additionally, the Kansas City Blues social media chair went on to explain the club's work with River of Refuge.  This group helps provide transitional housing for working homeless families in Kansas City. They provide them with temporary housing and financial coaching, etc. so that when they leave their temporary housing they have a savings account and good spending and savings habits that allows them to get out of the cycle of homelessness. The team conducted two large scale events with them where the team camped out on the roof of the charity to raise money

for the foundation in order to help fund the building of new apartments and help more and more families get back on their feet. In the first event, the Blues raised more than $40,000 through the use of social media promotions as well as local news promotions. The social media chair of the Blues appeared on local news outlets and morning shows leading up to the event and then during the event the Blues had multiple local news channels come out to the event for interviews during the camp-a-thon. The team camped out on the roof for three days until the Blues had raised over $40,000.

**Television Partnerships and Future Goals**

Television was not a widely used media outlet for club level rugby researched in this study.  Only one, the Barbarians social media chair, reported getting televised coverage for games.  However, the Blues had obtained television in the past, the Kansas City Blues do not have Television coverage for their games anymore.

Looking toward the future, the Palmer and Lions social media chairs aim to increase the frequency of the club's use of social media, especially Facebook.  The Griffins would like to explore using more video posts such as player interviews and profiles to raise awareness and engagement.  The Barbarians would like to take a different approach looking forward by spreading to new social media channels such as Snapchat, Instagram, and using more email distributions.  The Blues had a few key points that the social media chair wanted to explore to better the team.

> During certain Facebook live streams we will get hundreds of viewers and I think if we became more consistent with this we could get to a point where we had thousands of viewers and could sell ad space to sponsors. Constantly improving our level of consistency is key to what we are doing as far as growing our brand. I would also like to

see us get some of our best selling merchandise pieces in local "Kansas City" brand stores and see if we can promote the club and create an additional revenue stream that way.

The other goals of each social media chair for future club social media efforts all echoed more awareness and following on social media. Palmer explained that the team strives to have the highest following possible for a club rugby team. However, the Palmer social media chair also believes an increase in media following is contingent on the success of the Palmer rugby team, and vice versa. The Lions and Griffins would like to see a significant increase in engagement, followers, and content. The Blues hope to increase the Blues Twitter following to 3,000 and the Facebook following for the team to reach 5,000 by the end of 2017. Building from there, the Blues social media chair would like to create and establish an Instagram account for the Blues Team and get 1,000 followers along with increasing the attendance for home matches as the team has been able to do in the past. The Barbarians strive to grow the club's fan base and incorporate merchandise sales into the club's revenue stream.

# Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the social media strategies of the U.S. rugby club teams and PRO league, and to identify if there is a lack of mass communication education or training for the social media chairs in charge of executing said strategies. This study was done through in-depth email interviews of five Midwestern club level rugby team's and the PRO league's social media chairs. The thematic analysis from the in-depth interviews was broke the information into three categories, which were the background and job description of social media chairs, the strategies and plans of social media chairs, and the outcomes of social media to advance the game of rugby in the U.S.

**Main Findings**

While rugby has been gone from Olympics for 92 years (Rookward, 2003), There has been club rugby continuing in the Midwest at the very least since the 1960s. As explained by Rookward (2013) and Kocher (2014), rugby has yet to have consistent legacy media coverage. According to two of the five social media chairs (Blues and Barbarians), there have been efforts to obtaining televised media coverage. Moreover, the Blues and Barbarians teams and the PRO league have been either looking into streaming or streaming live games through social media. Kocher (2014) found that without money and broadcasts, rugby would struggle to grow in the United States. With three of the club sport teams (Blues, Barbarians, and Griffins) having sponsors, and two (Blues and Barbarians) having looked into television coverage, the growth of Midwestern club rugby may be taking its first steps.

With four of the club teams (Lions, Griffins, Blues, and Barbarians) and the PRO team all having Twitter, this could be the outlet for rugby fans who cannot watch any televised media or can stream the live games. With the ability to quickly do live updates on Twitter, a social media

chair would be able for updates on high-profile games.  This would be much like what Vann et al. (2015) found when looking at Twitter followings increasing when there was no televised coverage.  Something to note is that Twitter coverage was even higher when there was television coverage (Vann et al., 2015). Additionally, Emmett (2008) found that immediacy of social media has made it necessary for legacy media to use social media.  This may be a reason for people in charge of social media for club sports to use social media with legacy media.

The use of social media by club teams of this study and the PRO League also support the findings of Price et al. (2015) that social media has sped up the process of getting information to fans.  All of the club teams and PRO team use social media to give current game updates, scores, and news. Additionally, Price et al (2015) found 36 percent of club soccer teams use Twitter primarily for live games updates.  Four of the five club teams (Lions, Griffins, Blues, Barbarians) in this study said to have used Twitter primarily for live game updates.  These results only covered one of the four factors for sports teams to use Twitter which are interaction with the players and teams, see promotions for the team, live game updates, and news of the team (Gibbs et al. 2014).

Findings from Dixon et al. (2015), that using social media for raising awareness and marketing sports teams was the most important, most frequently used, and most successful are echoed by the answers from the in-depth interviews. Additionally, Dixon et al. (2015) found that messages for stakeholders were found to be shared on Facebook rather than Twitter.   All five club teams and the PRO League explained that Facebook was the most effective way to reach audiences.  The Griffins Vice president went on to explain that, "[Facebook] is the easiest, most user friendly, and interactive way for us to communicate with our fans." The ways that the club rugby teams and PRO teams have been raising awareness has been through posting live game

updates and information about games including especially photos and videos.  Much like Dixon et al. (2015), Palmer, Griffins, and Blues made a specific effort to reach out to 'old boys,' or retired rugby players of the clubs as stakeholders.  The Griffins, Blues, and Barbarians also participate in social media interactions with the club's sponsors and partners.

Greenhalgh et al. (2011) explained the need for athletes and teams should be increasing the level of spectator support through social media outlets.  The Griffins, Lions, and Barbarians post player profiles for the social media followers to get to know the current roster of players.  Further, Palmer, Lions, Griffins, and Blues create posts about charitable efforts of the teams and off-field activities. This adds to the findings of Geurin & Clavio (2015) in that players that post more personal sports-related content.

Some organizations such as the BBC in the study by Byrne (2015) have used multiplicity of social media engagement.  While this study was about television and social media use to increase voting in England, the same has been seen in rugby teams.  Four of the club teams (Lions, Griffins, Blues, and Barbarians) and the PRO League all use at least two different media platforms to disseminate information.  While it could be a positive step of using television and social media together as found in Vann et al. (2015), multiplicity in outlets has already begun to happen. Further, the PRO League Assistant Director of Rugby Operations expressed that he believed that Youtube would be the best way for rugby to expand in the U.S. Youtube was not found to be used by any of the club teams.

Crawford (2004) found that sports fans are not passive, but produce content themselves. Thompson et al. (2015) found that creating quality content, in commenting with fans, is the core of the interaction of social media.   Four of the five club teams (Palmer, Lions, Griffins, and Barbarians) all believe the best way to interact with audiences is to have the fans share posts.

The Blues take this one step further and conduct contests to promote interaction. These contests give the fans the opportunity to comment on posts to win merchandise, promoting them to make fan-created content on the Blue's social media.

Marino (2005) and Tyler (2013) found that job descriptions help organizations reduce time for training and ability to allow to show how to maintain and elevate the position of an employee. Four of the five club teams (Palmer, Lions, Griffins, and Blues) and the PRO League had established, but different duties when it came to posting on social media. The Barbarians President and IT manager stated that while he had duties given for social media, the job description itself was undefined.

Borden (2004) and Andreasen (2002) found that segmenting target audiences allows for maximum efficiency and effectiveness in the use of scarce resources. Three of the five club teams (Griffins, Blues, and Barbarians) all had a target audience that was segmented down to some degree of age or location. Palmer, Lions and the PRO League did not have a specific target for the club's social media efforts.

Krajocovic (2015) found that creating a strategy for an organization, there are five steps: identification of mission, and objectives, analysis of internal and external environment of the organization, formulation of the strategy, implementation, and evaluation. Four of the five teams (Palmer, Griffins, Blues, and Barbarians) and the PRO League all had some type of strategy. None of the interviewed social media chairs said they evaluated the strategies chosen.

Hall et al. (2013) found that creating and maintaining a profile creates impression management, or creates a social media identity for one's self. The PRO League explained that lower levels of rugby (club teams) should have more posts and should a team's social media should always keep fans informed, which was the approach and strategy of PRO. All five of the

club teams expressed using posts, primarily on Facebook, to connect with fans and create an image. Palmer went on to explain the social media efforts of Palmer strive to share the rugby culture in general.

Reasoning for conducting this study was to explore the education or training given to social media chairs of rugby teams. While there are some answers to questions to see the importance having a formal background in mass communication in this study, the answers given in the interviews showed an inherent baseline of knowledge found in the interviewed chairs/ Each social media chair knew some type of importance to using certain social media outlets whether it be Facebook for ease of use (Palmer, Lions, Griffins) and some knew the importance of getting instant game updates through using Twitter (Lions, Griffins, Barbarians) without having formal training in the outlets. Through future research, this could be something that could be a new study to how some rugby chairs obtain the skills to do their job either through previous use of the outlet, instructions given by previous chairs in the position, or through learning through simply having the position.

**General Recommendations**

There were three aspects that were found through this study that stood out as recommendations that both club and PRO leagues should implement for successful best practices in social media. The first recommendation came from the answers of the questions pertaining to the title and duties of that title of these rugby teams. The titles included**:** Head Coach (Palmer), Club Captain, 7s Team Captain, Head of Social Media (Lions), Vice President (Griffins), Recruitment Coordinator & Head of Social Media (Blues), President and IT Manager (Barbarians), Assistant Director of Rugby Operations (PRO). One recommendation would be to create a core communications official for these clubs that would have a set list of job

requirements, as the Barbarians described their job requirements as 'undefined." As Marino (2005) found, the importance for a job description allows the employee to know what club teams need to accomplish and how to accomplish the task.

The second recommendation would be to create a desired target audience that is defined through demographics. While the interviews of the club teams explained who they may want to target such as high school students or older veteran rugby players, only the Barbarians had a set age, gender, and recreational sport to describe their target they would like their messages to reach. Rugby is unable to obtain the financial resources to use legacy media, so the more effective choice would be social media (Kocher, 2014). The most effective way for rugby teams and professional rugby leagues to use social media would be to choose a target audience for messages to reach (Borden, 2004). Once the target audience or audiences are set, my third recommendation would be for club-level rugby teams to create a strategy to reach these audiences. The strategies were undefined from both the club-level teams and PRO league. The Blues, Barbarians, and Palmer were the closest in creating a strategy by deciding a unique use of Facebook. With a lack of using a strategy, the goals set out by the rugby organizations will not be met. The process of strategic management is "(1) identification of corporate mission, vision and objectives, (2) analysis of the internal and external environment of the company, (3) formulation of corporate strategy, (4) implementation of the strategy, and (5) evaluation and control of the achieved results" (Krajcovic, 2015, p. 23).

The importance of social media to niche sports, especially Facebook, has been discussed at length throughout the current study (Kocher, 2014; Dixon et al.,2015; Thompson et al., 2015). The interviews of Men's club rugby teams and the PRO league have echoed the importance of social media to their organization. Every club team interviewed had agreed that social media

was the most useful way to communicate messages with fans (Facebook being the most useful) because:

- Facebook has the most frequent media for fans to check game updates (Palmer)
- Due to its mobility, social media is the easiest and quickest way to spread the word about on and off the field events (Lions)
- It is the most user-friendly and interactive way to communicate with fans (Griffins)
- [Facebook] has the most followers and has the 'Facebook Live' feature to stream games (Blues) Social media (and emails) can be tracked when opened/ viewed (Barbarians)
- [Social media] allows for our fans to keep informed and engaged (PRO)

The evidence that the rugby teams and league are aware of the importance of social media mirror the evidence found in the previous studies.

Greenhalgh et al. (2011) suggested that niche sports looking to increase their spectator support would be well served by using social media. From the interview with the Kansas City Blues, there was evidence that there is evidence of this advancing niche sports spectator support.

We have seen a massive increase in our match attendance and alumni interaction. Since I first joined the club 11+ years ago we have increased average gate attendance by 300% and we now generate a few thousand dollars of gate and merchandise sales at each home match. For certain big games, we will have 500-1,000 fans at our matches and during one heavily promoted game against a touring team from Australia we had over 2,000 fans at Children's Mercy Championship Field at Swope.

Kansas City Blues (p. 2)

Additionally, Palmer College had similar results stating, "We have seen great progress, we are pushing to increase the likes on our page each season, and have used the Facebook Ads to attempt to reach out to potential player/students." Further, the Milwaukee Barbarians had also found an increase of spectator support saying that social media use resulted in a steady growth in followers, improved brand awareness, and sold-out events.

An advantage of using social media allows for two-way communication between the sports teams, players, and leagues (Crawford 2004; Kocher, 2014; Geurin & Clavio 2015; Price et al., 2015; Thompson et, al. 2015). Social media bridges the gap between player (team and league) and supporter of a team, opening clubs to a wider audience, reaching a younger demographic directly, attracting social media to their website, and marketing merchandise (Price et al., 2015). The in-depth interviews found that within club-level rugby and professional leagues, the interaction between supporters have been based in sharing posts/ retweeting. Other types of two-way communication are: timely response to inquiries (Lions), obtaining action photos of players who will be tagged in them and shared (Griffons), and occasionally a promotional giveaway for a piece of merchandise to the winner, (create a caption contests for a particular photo) (Blues). Other than attracting followers to their website, the rugby club-level teams and professional league perform some type of interaction with their followers. Sharing information about sponsors was a use of social media found by Guerin & Clavio (2015). While only three of the club-level rugby teams had sponsor-related content (Giffins, Blues, & Barbarians), they all used social media to promote their sponsors

Twitter was found to be almost exclusively used to inform followers of game updates from all interviewers (Boehmer, 2015). Facebook was used for score/game updates, photos and short videos, game rosters, community outreach, event promotion, final score graphics, weekly

highlight films, and player spotlights by the club teams.  Similarly, PRO uses Facebook and Twitter to give game updates, alert followers about breaking news, game rosters, game highlights, and live game feeds.  The factors for individuals to interact with sports teams Gibbs et al. (2014) were interaction with the players and teams, to see promotions for the teams, live game updates, and news of the teams.  The results of this study only having the club teams and PRO leagues focusing on the live game updates as a primary use of Twitter.

Other than the above recommendations, I have created a best practices model for the teams to abide by.

## Recommendations Within the Model

The Table 5.1 is a best practices model combined from Castronovo & Huang (2012) and Wysocki (2012).  The model below would benefit the club teams and PRO League from information gathered in this study.  Building awareness, increasing sales, and building loyalty are all goals of the club teams and PRO League researched in this study.  The best practices from Wysocki (2012) are used as strategies for reaching the goals from Castronovo & Huang (2012).  Within the club teams and PRO League interviewed in this study, these best practices have already been started.  For instance, Barbarian's rugby already use emails and Facebook posts primarily to track their audience's reactions to content and the Blues use contests to 'gamify' their social media content.   If the best practices were used to directly impact the goals of building awareness, increasing sales, and building loyalty, it is possible to see an increase in social media following for the teams and league.

**Table 0.1 U.S. Rugby Social Media Best Practices Model**

| | Castonovo & Huang (2012) | | Wysocki (2012) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Goals** | **Related Metrics** | | **Best Practices** |
| Building Awareness | • Web traffic and web traffic referrals<br>• Search volume trends and volume of followers<br>• Social mentions<br>• Share of voice | | • Give quality content<br>• Incorporate social media offline<br>• Gamify social media efforts<br>• Fansource/Crowdsource<br>• Use fans to amplify message<br>• Track, measure, adjust |
| Increase Sales | • Web traffic and time spent on site<br>• Bounce rate and content acceptance rate<br>• Repeat visits and volume of followers<br>• Social mentions<br>• Share of voice | | • Give quality content<br>• Gamify social media efforts<br>• Collect fan data<br>• Use fans to amplify message<br>• Track, measure, and adjust |
| Building Loyalty | • Time spent on site<br>• Repeat visits and volume of followers Content acceptance rate<br>• Repeated social mentions<br>• Share of voice<br>• Recommendations and reviews<br>• Social connectivity among purchasers | | • Give quality content<br>• Gamify social media efforts<br>• Personalize fans<br>• Collect fan data<br>• Fansource/Crowdsource<br>• Track, measure, and adjust |

Note. Goals and related metrics from Castronovo & Huang (2012), Best Practices from Wysocki (2012).

## Theories and Connections to Findings

### Framing Theory

Another main area of study for this study is to identify the application of the framing and

impression management theories within rugby social media practices. Kidd (2010) explained

that framing an organization may need to come through finding different audiences. The Blues

and Griffins both expressed their use of "old boys" or alumni audiences that were an important

asset for keeping the club sustained through fundraising. The Blues and Lions also partnered

with charities and held events which expanded their reach as an organization to the audiences of the respective partner charity audiences. The club level teams also framed their messages according to the ability to use the outlets. For Twitter, a majority of club team social media chairs used it primarily for score updates. These were messages framed in length to give succinct information, nothing more than information. For Facebook, there were a number of different reasons such as player profiles, updates about the club, aforementioned retired alumni posts, and club culture posts (Palmer).

Smith (2014) and Kassing & Sanderson 2010 both explained the use of framing a sport around the use of social media. Cyclists during the Italian cycling competition embraced the interaction with their fans through social media through posting videos and pictures. All the club-level teams and professional league also interact with their fans through posting photos and videos. In some cases, individuals promoted the rugby culture (Palmer), sharing engaging rugby content (Griffins), and posting about participating in community events to highlight the players reaching out to the surrounding community (Blues, Lions) to create a perception about the organizations.

The three frames described in Kidd (2011) are the marketing frame (creating a 'face' of the organization), the inclusivity frame (reaching multiple organizations with separate messages) and the collaborative frame (using the followers of social media to create the content). The inclusivity frame for the club-level rugby teams has been accomplished by creating separate messages on their social media (Facebook) for veteran (retired) rugby players aside from the general posts of information to the entirety of their followers. The oldest club is 53 (Lions) and the youngest is 31(Palmer). This retired players were a large audience for the Blues having 1,500 veteran players after its 51 years of existence. The Blues social media following at 4,500

on Facebook, meaning these messages to veteran players would hit a large portion of their social media following directly.

The marketing frame has been used by the club-level teams and professional league, but mainly to the existing audience.  While the club-teams have made efforts to reach out to non-rugby groups, a large majority of posts were for the current followers who already know about rugby. The use of advertisements on social media, however, have been used by club-level rugby.   The PRO league targeted rugby social media users to initially gain recognition on social media, then have been approaching non-rugby individuals to reach out to new followers.  The club-level teams and professional teams all have explained they use engaging content, which would be a use of the collaborative frame.  However, further research would have to be conducted to understand to what extent followers make the content.

**Impression Management Theory**

Impression management was a theory identified in the actions and duties of social media chairs interviewed in this study.  Much like the use of framing audiences by media outlet, separate impressions could be found by the different outlets made and the different types of posts created on those outlets.  For example, near all teams used Twitter to reach out to fans for quick updates during games.  But for Facebook, social media chairs such as the Griffins, created posts to make an impression on the audiences with a focus on the old boys, or alumni players.  Similarly, the Blues built their identity of more a part of the Kansas City culture by partnering with charities around the areas.  Partnering for community outreach adds to the Kansas City Blues social media identity as more than a rugby team, but a charitable organization.  All social media chairs interviewed would also like for the history of their club to become public

knowledge, which would further the already established social media identity of each team if presented on the club's outlets.

Within creating the perception for social media through community service, promoting the rugby culture, and frequent posting, club-level teams and the PRO league have been able to start creating their own social media identity. In creating and maintaining the social media profiles, these organizations have been able to promote their organization while highlighting their identity on social media (Hall et al., 2013). Carah (2015) explored the use of interaction through social media by followers. This was primarily explained by the Blues use of merchandise giveaways, but the rest of the answers to the in-depth interviews would suggest that this type of engagement with followers of the club-level teams and the PRO League should explore engagement through social media. Further, Nisar & Whitehead (2016) found that individuals are more likely to purchase goods and services from brands' official page, so if shared information from the official club team or professional league were to be viewed, there is a better chance of individuals attending games.

**Limitations**

This study is not without limitations. There are a variety of different segments of rugby that were not researched within this study. For example, Women's rugby in the U.S. is attempting to grow just as Men's rugby. Further, the club-rugby teams only represent one region of Men's rugby in the U.S. There are different regions within the U.S. that may have different ways of using social media or have different social media popularity for their communities in

terms of club-level rugby, where this study strictly looks at the Midwestern D-1 club-level teams. There are also collegiate, high school, and elementary levels that were not a part of this study.

The style of rugby is also another variant that can change how rugby social media chairs may frame their social media, but this study focuses on 15s. Within the U.S., there is 7s rugby (played with seven players to a side) and there is 15s rugby (played with 15 players a side). While both is considered rugby, and follow most of the same core guidelines. 7s rugby is a much faster paced game with less hitting and more running, making it more dynamic of a viewing experience, but the match that is played is only 14 minutes long, a much shorter game than the 80-minute 15's style matches. This study can be used for other types of sports, the results from the interviews may have had different results in terms of which social media outlet is used more often and what type of post on those outlets are used the most.

Aside from the different types of rugby, there are also different types of social media that could be researched. Instagram and Snapchat are two of the larger social media sites, but were not a part of this study due to the size of the audience of Facebook and Twitter. Further, this study also only looks at social media. Evidence seen through Major League Soccer's growth in the U.S. showed many other factors (revenue, number of television spots, popular sports personalities) can increase the level of media coverage of legacy media (Litke, 2011).

## Future Studies

As explained in my limitations, there are different varieties of rugby that could be researched in the future. Different regions within the U.S. may have different uses of social media with different outcomes as what this study has found. Moreover, a study focused on Women's rugby instead of Men's may very well hold different results in social media outlets and

choice of framing.  From the results of this study, there was an overall lack of interviewers with a background in mass communication.  If there was a study that compared social media chairs with and without backgrounds in mass communication, there may be a change in decisions in posting, strategies, and target audience choice.  Future research can also be done to see the difference in social media strategies for club-level teams for 15s rugby and 7s rugby.  The differences of the sports make them marketable in different ways (time of the game, style of the sports in comparison to existing sports such as American Football, etc).  With the differences of 15s and 7s existing within the same emerging sport, coupled with two different genders present in either style of rugby could be explored in the future to examine how the other rugby teams use social media.    In regard to the level of rugby, future research could include teams lower than D-1 club-level such as college or high school rugby teams and how they use social media. Additionally, research for how the USA Eagles, the international team conducts social media would be viable to understand how rugby teams with the most resources use their media outlets would be advantageous.

The model chosen was a combination of best practices of social media use for small to medium emerging organizations and NBA teams.  If a different model were chosen to evaluate the answers from the interviews, the recommendations given would be different as well.  The theories of this study were also focusing on the mediums and strategies framed to create a social media identity for the U.S. rugby teams.  Even using the same theories but changing the focus to the sentiment of the posts rather than the sites the clubs and PRO league chose would be important to understand how the audiences of the rugby team's social media would react to the information.

In terms of the type of medium used, other types of social media could lead to future research. Instagram and Snapchat are continuing to grow in popularity (Chaffey, 2017). New types of social media will bring more information about how to contact audiences and which types of posts will work within the study's best practices model.

Future study could also be able to be used to create a best practice model for existing and future niche sports emerging in the U.S. Sports such as lacrosse or cricket (Greenhalgh et al., 2011), would be able to determine which types of social media posts should be used on their pages to raise awareness about their sport.

Lastly, this is a qualitative study. Further research can now use these best practices to quantitatively see how many other club-level rugby teams fit the best practices model. This could entail sending a survey out to a larger amount of rugby chairs to see how many teams are performing the same social media strategies and see how many clubs should follow the same recommendations as listed in this study. Further, there will be a baseline of information for any new professional leagues beginning in the U.S. and allow for researchers to see what worked well in the past to increase the number of successful strategies in the future.

## Conclusion

This study has explored the way that social media chairs for club-level rugby teams and professional leagues have been using social media. With the adjustment in the structure of duties given to the social media chairs and the integration of the model provided in this study, it is believed that there will be an increase in social media following for rugby in the U.S. Rugby is a niche sport and will continue to be a niche sport until legacy media has been accessed and without a strong enough following, that will not happen. It is important for rugby clubs and

leagues to and the incorporate a list of designated duties, a target audience, and strategy before moving on with their social media. With these three recommendations and the model proposed in this study, there is a possibility to build awareness, increase sales, and build loyalty within these niche sport social media followings.

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# Appendix A - Definitions of Terms

Professional sport: sport league that pays the players they employ

Club rugby: non-professional (unpaid) rugby that is the level directly before professional rugby

D-1: There are four divisions within club rugby, D-1 is the highest division, D-4 is the lowest.

USA Rugby: governing body of rugby within the United States

Types of rugby:

15's: A type of rugby played with 15 players to a side, games are 80 minutes long.

Sevens: A type of rugby played with seven players to a side, games are 14 minutes long.

Legacy Media- Print, radio, of television coverage.  Also, known as mainstream or traditional media.

Mainstream Sport- sport that obtains consistent legacy media coverage.

Niche Sport- A sport that does not obtain as much legacy media attention (print, TV, Radio) than sports such as U.S. football, baseball, & basketball.

Old Boy- A retired player of a club team

# Appendix B - Permissions from Organizations to Use Tables & Figures



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Mon 3/27, 9:45 PM
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Hi Joe,

Your email was forwarded my way. Yes, it is fine for you to use that content in your thesis. Best of luck with everything!

Cheers
Nick

---
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## Research for Masters

**KA** Kenny Ager <kenny@weplay.co>
Thu 4/20, 6:49 AM
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# Appendix C: Breakdown of In-Depth Interviews

What is your name and title (on the team, e.g. social media chair)?

Palmer: Head Coach

Lions: Club Captain, 7s Team Captain, Head of Social Media

Griffins: Vice President

Blues: The Recruitment Coordinator & Head of Social Media for the Kansas City Blues.

Barbarians: President and IT Manager

      The title for the person who oversees social media varied depending on the team. The Lions and the Blues gave the name of 'Head of Social Media' to the person in charge of social media. Head coach (Palmer), Vice President (Griffins), IT Manager (Barbarians), President (Barbarians), Recruitment Coordinator (Blues), and Captain (Lions) were all other positions that were also in charge of social media. Two of the five teams (Palmer & Griffins) had only one title. Two of the five teams (Blues & Barbarians) had two titles within their organization. One person in charge of social media (Lions) had three titles in the organization.

What team do you play/ work for?

Palmer: Palmer College of Chiropractic Men's Rugby Club

Lions: Chicago Lions

Griffins: Chicago Griffins RFC

Blues: Kansas City Blues Rugby

Barbarians: Milwaukee Barbarians Athletic Club

Each club-level rugby team had a specific way of naming their team.  One of five teams (Palmer) had the location, gender specification, and organization they are associated with in their team name.  One team (Lions) were only called by their location and mascot.  One of five teams (Griffins) used their location, mascot, and acronym RFC (rugby football club).  One of the five teams (Blues) used their location, mascot, and their sport in the team name.  One of the five teams (Barbarians) used their location, mascot, and defined themselves as an Athletic club.  All five of the teams used their location in the team name.

Do you have a background in mass communication?

Palmer: no

Lions:no

Griffins:no

Blues: No but I have my bachelors in Entrepreneurship w/ a minor in Marketing from St. Louis University and I also handle all social media and marketing for my company.

Barbarians: no

Four out of the five club-level rugby teams had not had any formal education.  The one club-level social media chair was from the Kansas City Blues and had obtained a minor in marketing while attending St. Louis University.  The blues major while in college was in Entrepreneurship.  The Kansas City Blues social media chair had also gained experience in using mass communication (social media) through using social media to promote his own company.

When did your rugby team start?

Palmer: 1986

Lions:1964

Griffins:1973

Blues: We were established in 1966

Barbarians: Originally 1975. Merged to a new entity in 2012.

All five of the club-level interview subjects knew the year their team was started. Chicago Lions were the oldest team, starting in 1964. The second oldest team was the Kansas City Blues (1966). The third oldest team was the Chicago Giffins (1973). The origin of the Barbarians was the fourth oldest (1975). The youngest team was the Palmer Dragons (1986).

Would you say that the history of your team is something that you wish to be public knowledge?

Palmer: Yes, Of Course

Lions: Absolutely

Griffins:yes

Blues: Yes. We did a big 50th anniversary push last year. We made a film honoring and documenting our history and unveiled it at our 50th anniversary celebration at the Arrowhead Pavilion this past summer. We also sent a special group of alumni as well as the current team to celebrate the Blues 50th anniversary in Aspen this past Fall at the annual Aspen Ruggerfest because this has long been an annual tradition for our club. We have had well over 1,500 players in our 50 years of existence and we made a lot of efforts to update our records of alumni and get them engaged on social media, etc.

Barbarians:yes

All five teams wished to have their team history to be public knowledge. The Blues have celebrated the club's history through a film and gatherings of retired and current blues players. The Blues have also sent their alumni on trips with current players to commemorate their 50th anniversary of the club's existence. The Blues have had over 1,500 players since their start in 1966.


What are some of the biggest events (community outreach, tournaments) your team participates in? How do you promote these events?

Palmer: We have an Alumni Symposium game once a year, usually in April, and we have a team of alumni, and students that push to get alumni, friends, recruits, and family to return for the double header home game (Women's team as well).

Lions: Christmas in the Wards, support of Chicago Hope Academy Football (comm. outreach), high-profile XVs matches (away trip to NOLA in March '17, hosting Old Blue RFC of NY in May '17, competing in the Las Vegas Invitational (7s, champions in 2010 and 2017) and being perennial contenders at the USA Club Rugby 7s National Championship Tournament. Promotion of these events is conducted through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Email blasts.

Griffins: We participate in youth, high school, and collegiate rugby clinics. We have also hosted fundraisers for a variety of charitable organizations.

Blues: On the field, each year we host the Heartland 7's National Qualifier Tournament at Swope Park at the Children's Mercy Championship Field. We host 8 teams from all over the region (Denver, Salt Lake City, Omaha, St. Louis, Tulsa, New Mexico, etc.) as well as other ancillary brackets with varying levels of competition. This is a large-scale event with hundreds of athletes

participating and over a thousand attendees. The event requires sponsorship, sponsor hotels, setting up and working the gate for admission to sell tickets, full concessions, etc. We promote the event on social media using primarily Facebook (we have almost 5,000 followers on Facebook) and Twitter (almost 1,700 followers) as well as through our email distribution lists, alumni group on Facebook, etc.

Off the field, we do an annual Christmas philanthropic event in conjunction with St. Thomas Aquinas Rugby. In this event we adopt 7-10 less fortunate families for a total of around 35-50 people each year. We adopt the families, donate money, help collect donations, shop for gifts, wrap all the gifts then coordinate all the gift delivery the Saturday before Christmas. WE typically promote this via social media as well as our website.

We have also done large scale coordinated events with River of Refuge http://www.riverofrefuge.com/. This group helps provide transitional housing for working homeless families in Kansas City. They provide them with temporary housing and financial coaching, etc. so that when they leave their temporary housing they have a savings account and good spending and savings habits that allows them to get out of the cycle of homelessness. We have done two large scale events with them where we camp out on their roof while we raise money for the foundation to help them fund the building of new apartments to house and help more and more families get back on their feet. In our first event, we raised more than $40,000 using social media promotions as well as local news promotions. Myself and another associate of the Kansas City Blues appeared on local news outlets and morning shows leading up to the event and then during the event we had multiple local news channels come out to the event and interview us during the camp-a-thon. We camped out on the roof for 3 days until we hit our goal of over $40,000.

Barbarians: We run the largest summer rugby event in the country: 125+ teams. We use mailing lists and Facebook primarily.

Each of the five teams host unique events to promote their club. The Palmer Dragons host an Alumni Game and promote it through the alumni and players. The Lions perform community outreach events and participate in high-profile 15's matches, the Las Vegas Invitational, and the USA Club Rugby Seven's National Championship. The Lions promote these events through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Email. The Griffins participate in youth, high school, and collegiate rugby clinics and put on fundraisers for charities. The Blues host the Heartland Seven's National Qualifier Tournament in Kansas City. This event brings hundreds of rugby players to Kansas City and is promoted through Facebook, Twitter, and email. The Blues also work with charities to help less-fortunate families during the holidays and promote the charitable works through personal social media and the Blues' website. Additionally, the Blues partner with River of Refuge to help raise money to aid the homeless in the Kansas City area. The Blues have raised up to $40,000 during an event and the social media coverage is conducted by the head of social media along with an associate and the event is covered by local news during the event. The Barbarians host the largest summer rugby event in the country with over 125 teams participating. The Barbarians promote the event through Facebook and email.

What are your routine duties in terms of promoting the team (print, special events, tv, interviews, etc.)?

Palmer: Simply posting game schedules, pictures, scores, and events that the team participates in.

Lions: Posting lineups weekly across the social media platforms, posting live scores and updates on game day across the social media platforms, promoting off-field activities via the same means as well.

Griffins: Posting results, sending out newsletters to old boys and people subscribe to our mailing lists. Putting together rosters, player profiles.

Blues: Updating and engaging fans in social media. Creating and providing professional graphics leading up to events (match day programs & rosters, etc.) For our larger events such as playoff matches the Heartland 7's National Qualifier Tournament or the River of Refuge camping event we will engage local news outlets and do interviews, etc. promoting these events. We also put out weekly highlights of our matches during the week following the match. This helps keep our fans that may not be in the Kansas City area engaged with how we are doing, which players are excelling, etc.

Barbarians: Mostly Facebook events, blogging, mailing lists, and occasionally post cards. Sometimes we do paid ads on Facebook to promote fund raisers or other big events.

The routine duties of each person in charge of social media varied. Four of the five (Dragons, Lions, Griffins, & Blues) said they are tasked with updating fans through scores of matches. Three of the five (Lions, Griffins, & Blues) post lineups and rosters prior to the matches. The Barbarians post Facebook events, blogs, pay for ads, use mailing lists, and direct mail. One of the five (Blues) give highlights a week following events and matches.


What type of promotion do you want to work on in the future to elevate the awareness and fan base of your team?

Palmer: I would like to utilize our Facebook page more often, attempt to reach more students on campus as well as future prospective students

Lions: More frequent, local engagement to increase game-day crowds and involvement (and potential gate revenue). Additionally, further promotion of youth clubs with which the Lions are affiliated

Griffins: More video promotion and interviews with players pre/post-match. Sponsor plugs

Blues: I think we need to engage more main stream media and get to a point where we consistently stream all our matches through a simple and consistent video platform such as Ustream. During certain Facebook live streams, we will get hundreds of viewers and I think if we became more consistent with this we could get to a point where we had thousands of viewers and could sell ad space, etc. to sponsors. Constantly improving our level of consistency is key to what we are doing as far as growing our brand. I would also like to see us get some of our best-selling merchandise pieces in local "Kansas City" brand stores and see if we can promote the club and create an additional revenue stream that way.

Barbarians: SnapChat and Instagram, more physical mail.

The ways for the club-level teams would like to progress varied. One of the five teams would like to use Facebook more in the future and reach out to prospective college aged students. One of the five teams (Lions) would like to increase engagement and attendance to games through social media in addition to promoting the youth rugby teams the Lions are affiliated with. One of the five teams (Griffins) would like to increase video interviews with players and get sponsored messages for the club. One of the five teams (Blues) would like to reach out to mainstream media, consistently stream all of the Blues games on their social media, and get their merchandise into "Kansas City" brand stores. One of the five teams (Barbarians)

would like to expand their social media efforts to Snapchat and Instagram as well as increase their use of direct mail.

Do you have any goals through social media or otherwise for your team's growth?

Palmer: I would like to be the team in our league with the most Facebook likes on our team page. I would like to have the largest following, which will be supported be a more successful team. But I believe that these two elements work together.

Lions: An increase in followers, content, and engagement of supporters.

Griffins: The more likes the better obviously as that significantly increases our exposure to the rugby playing masses. Putting together quality coaching tips and content will drive engagement as well

Blues: I would like to see us get to 3,000 Twitter followers and 6,000 Facebook followers by the end of 2017. I would also like to see us start an Instagram account and get 1,000 followers on there by the end of the year. Other than that, I would like to see our average home match attendance continue to grow each season and see us continue to host more and more local highschool and collegiate rugby matches in conjunction with our matches so we can continue to be the leader in Elite Rugby in both Kansas City and the entire Midwest region.

Barbarians: We are growing our fan base and then plan to reach out to sell apparel and other merchandise

Four of the five teams (Palmer, Lions, Griffins, Blues) have goals to increase their likes on social media. One of the five (Palmer) believes that the more successful their team performs; the more followers the club's Facebook will have. Two of the five teams (Lions & Griffins) want to increase content and engagement along with increasing likes. One of the five teams

(Blues) want to increase attendance at games and high school level rugby games that the Blues host.  One of the five teams (Barbarians) would like an increase in fan base and plan to sell apparel and other merchandise.

Do you have a target audience?

If so, what is it?

Palmer: Anyone who is interested, mainly students

Lions:no

Griffins: Old Boys from the club, youth/high school/collegiate players who might be looking to continue playing, target audience of our sponsors (create relevant content).

Blues: Mostly we focus on the friends and social networks of those involved with the club and our alumni base of 1,500+ as well as the friends and families of all the local youth, highschool and collegiate rugby clubs in the area but the last year or two we have been making an effort to try to grow into people that are completely outside of the rugby community.

Barbarians: Male, 21-30, greater metro area, rugby, bastketball or football experience.

Two of the five teams (Griffins & Blues) have a target audience of alumni and collegiate, high school, and youth rugby players and families. One of the five teams (Blues) is making an effort to reach out to non-rugby communities.   One of the five teams (Barbarians) had an age, gender, location, and recreational activity to target their audience.  The Barbarians target audience is males 21-30 years of age in the greater metro area interested in rugby, basketball, and football.  One of the five teams (Palmer) has a target audience of students and anyone who is interested.  One of the five teams (Lions) does not have a target audience.

What are your strategies for reaching these audiences (social media and otherwise)?

Palmer: Highlighting the successes of our club, promoting our culture as well as using Facebook Ads to acknowledge that there are scholarships available for playing at Palmer.

Lions: Other than increased content and sponsor engagement, we have no specific strategy now.

Griffins: Share engaging rugby content, news, videos, highlights, etc.

Blues: Typically, we use our social media platforms and email distribution lists as well as our alumni group on Facebook.

Barbarians: Facebook targeting

Three of the five (Palmer, Lions, & Blues) specified using Facebook as part of their strategy in reaching audiences.  One of the five team's (Palmer) strategy includes highlighting success of their club, promoting the culture, and advertising the scholarship available for playing for the club.  One of the five teams (Lions) have no specific strategy at the time of the interview. One of the five team's (Griffins) strategy is to share content, news, videos, and highlights.  One of the five team's (Blues) strategy is to use email distribution and the alumni of the club to reach audiences.

What made you decide on those strategies?

Palmer: Personal experience, and what has been successful in the past.

Lions: The desire to engage more members of the local and rugby community.

Griffins: General webinars and articles on digital and social media marketing.

Blues:

Barbarians: Basketball and football have many transferrable skills, so it's important for us for recruiting

One of the five teams (Palmer) chose the club's strategy through personal experience. One of the five teams (Lions) chose the club's strategy through the desire to engage members of

the local and rugby community.  One of the five teams (Griffins) chose the club's strategy through webinars and articles from social media marketing.  One of the five teams (Barbarians) chose the club's strategy through the knowledge that basketball and football have transferrable skills useful to rugby, which would be an advantage to recruiting.

What type of social media do you primarily use to inform your fan base?

Palmer: Facebook

Lions: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter

Griffins: Primarily FB, but often IG and much less often TV, radio

Blues: Primarily Facebook and Twitter but we admittedly need to add Instagram as an additional promotional tool to continue to engage the younger users

Barbarians: Facebook with a little Twitter.

All five of the interviewed club-level social media chairs explained that they use Facebook to inform their fanbase.  Two of five chairs (Griffins & Blues) said they used Facebook primarily, with one saying they also use Twitter primarily (Blues).  Three out of the five chairs said they use Twitter.  Two of the five (Griffins & Barbarians) said they use the social media platform known as Instagram to inform their fanbase.  One of the five expressed that he needed to add Instagram for engaging younger users.

Would you say social media is the most effective way to reach your fans? If so, why?

Palmer: Facebook is the most effective way- as most of our fans will check Facebook on game day if they can't make the game

Lions: Yes; based on the way most everyone interacts via their phones, this is the easiest and quickest way to spread the word to supporters about varying on and off field events

Griffins: From what I can tell it is the easiest, most user friendly, and interactive way for us to communicate with our fans

Blues: As of now it is Facebook for us simply because we by far have the most followers in this platform and their "Facebook Live" feature allows us to stream certain matches to our fans, etc.

Barbarians: Facebook and Email. They are most effective because we can track opens/views.

Three out of five teams (Palmer, Blues, & Barbarians) specifically believe Facebook is the most effective social media outlet to reach fans.  One of the five teams (Lions) believe social media is the easiest and quickest way to reach fans.  One of the five teams (Griffins) believes social media is the easiest, most user-friendly, and interactive way to reach fans.  One of the teams (Blues) chose Facebook as the most effective way to reach audiences because Facebook is the largest following the club has and allows them to stream the club's matches live.  One of the five teams (Barbarians) believe that Facebook and email are the most effective ways of using social media to reach fans due to their ability to track opens and views of the content.

What type of progress have you seen from utilizing social media (specifically Facebook and Twitter) in reaching your audience?

Palmer: We have seen great progress, we are pushing to increase the likes on our page each season, and have used the Facebook Ads to attempt to reach out to potential player/students

Lions: An increased engagement from supporters reliance from national rugby media outlets – as well as Midwest & USA Rugby, the regional and national governing bodies for the sport – on results and box scores from games, increased followers across both of the aforementioned platforms.

Griffins: Immediate updates from game progress, communication. We get a lot of old boy engagement that was previously very hard to gauge

Blues: We have seen a massive increase in our match attendance and alumni interaction. Since I first joined the club 11+ years ago we have increased average gate attendance by 300% and we now generate a few thousand dollars of gate and merchandise sales at each home match. For certain big games, we will have 500-1,000 fans at our matches and during one heavily promoted game against a touring team from Australia we had over 2,000 fans at Children's Mercy Championship Field at Swope.

Barbarians: Steady growth in followers, improved brand awareness. Sold out events.

Two of the five teams (Lions & Barbarians) have seen an increase in followers with the use of Facebook. Two of the five teams (Blues & Griffins) have seen an increase in alumni (old boy) engagement. Two of the five teams (Blues & Barbarians) have seen an increase in match attendance. The Blues have seen an increase of match attendance by 300 percent over 11 years and an increase in merchandise sales. The Barbarians have had sold out events in addition to increase in brand awareness.

What are your duties specifically for social media?

Palmer: Posting Team Updates

Lions: Posting lineups weekly across the social media platforms, posting live scores and updates on game day across the social media platforms, promoting off-field activities via the same means as well.

Griffins: Posting match results/progress, player profiles, sponsor profiles, world/USA rugby news, old boy profiles, gameday rosters.

Blues: See answer above.

Barbarians: Undefined. Though currently we use Face to publish our matches as events (people who RSVP get notifications of venue or time changes) as well as roster and scores. Real-time video with Facebook live is getting interesting.

Four of the five people in charge of social media (Palmer, Lions, Griffins, and Barbarians) are tasked to give updates on the teams. Three of the five people in charge of social media for their respective clubs (Lions, Griffins, & Barbarians) are tasked with posting rosters and scores. One of the five individuals interviewed (Lions) is tasked with posting about off-field activities. One of the individuals interviewed (Griffins) is tasked with posting information about alumni profiles, USA and World Rugby news, player profiles, and sponsor profiles. One of the five individuals (Barbarians) expressed that the position in charge of posting to social media is undefined.

What social media outlets do you personally use?

Palmer: Facebook

Lions:Facebook, Instagram, Twitter

Griffins: Facebook, IG, Twitter

Blues: See answer above.

Barbarians: Facebook, some twitter

All five of the individuals interviewed personally use Facebook. Three of the five individuals (Lions, Griffins, & Barbarians) use Twitter. Two of the five individuals (Lions & Griffins) use Instagram. One of the four individuals (Palmer) only used Facebook as their personal social media.

Which type of social media posts (videos, player spotlights, game updates, community outreach) do you rely on most for Facebook?

Palmer: Score updates, photos and short videos

Lions: Videos, community outreach, event promotion

Griffins: Primarily match photos and score/result updates

Blues: Mostly game day rosters/programs, score updates, final score graphics & weekly highlight films.

Barbarians: Game updates, player spotlights

All five club teams use Facebook primarily to give followers score/game updates. Two of the club teams (Palmer, Griffins, & Blues) use social media posts to post photos and graphics. Three of the five (Palmer, Lions & Blues) post videos and films on social media. One of the five club teams (Barbarians) use Facebook posts to primarily post player spotlights. One of the five club teams (Lions) use Facebook posts to share community outreach and promote events of the club.

Which type of social media posts do you rely on most for Twitter?

Palmer: n/a

Lions: live gameday updates

Griffins:Score/ results updates

Blues: Same as above. We try to post most updates to both platforms.

Barbarians:scores

Four of the five teams (Lions, Griffins, Blues, & Barbarians) all use Twitter to update fans. Two of the five (Griffins & Barbarians) use Twitter to post score updates. One of the five

teams (Lions) post on Twitter for live gameday updates.  One of the five teams use Twitter and Facebook to simultaneously update followers.

Which type of social media posts seem to be the most popular/ effective (most likes or shares/retweets or comments)?

Palmer: Photos and Short Videos

Lions: Posts regarding higher-profile competition, specifically on Facebook and Instagram, as well as posts of photos and/or videos from live game content.

Griffins: Facebook definitely gets the most engagement.

Blues: The highlight films seem to get the most views and interactions. Or the final graphic posts after we win a big match. Occasionally prior to a big home match we will use Facebook ads to help get the word out and try to reach those that may be outside of or only peripheral to the rugby community.

Barbarians: Match reports, photos, high-profile players

  Four of the five teams (Palmer, Lions, Blues, & Barbarians) explained their most popular/effective posts involve photos or graphics.  One of the five teams (Griffins) have found that Facebook gets the team the most engagement from followers.  Three of the five (Palmer, Lions & Blues) found that videos also are among the most popular posts on social media for their respective teams.  Two of the five teams (Blues & Barbarians) found that their most popular posts are reports after a match.  One of the five (Blues) use ads to reach audiences outside the rugby community.  One of the five teams (Barbarians) believe posts about high-profile players are the most popular posts for their teams.

In what way do you promote people interacting with your site (e.g. posting pictures of themselves, sharing your posts, engaging in conversation)?

Palmer: Sharing of posts would be the most common

Lions: Timely responses to inquiries, increase in content, sharing posts by others regarding the club.

Griffins: We have a good photographer that gets really good action shots at most of our matches so we are able to tag people in photos and the action shots themselves are good for getting people to look at them and share them.

Blues: Occasionally we will do a promotion where we give away a piece of merchandise to the winner. For example, in the past we have done "create a caption" contests for a particular photo. We also do Facebook ads for our larger matches & events.

Barbarians: Sharing posts

Three of the five teams (Palmer, Lions, Barbarians) interact with followers through sharing posts. One of the five teams (Lions) state that responding to inquiries and increasing content are the most common ways of interacting with fans. One of the five (Griffins) interact with followers by using a photographer to share photos of players at the game and having players share the photos. One of the five teams (Blues) host a merchandise giveaway contest to get fans interacting on social media. Additionally, the Blues pay for advertisements for larger matches and events to interact with fans.

How many people follow your page?

Palmer: 3340

Lions: FB: 2,490;     IG: 712;     Twitter: 1,423

Griffins:1079

Blues: 4,500+ on Facebook and almost 1,700 on Twitter.

Barbarians:1500

All five of the teams have over 1,000 followers on Facebook.  The Blues have the most Facebook followers with over 4,500.  The Griffins have the lowest Facebook following of the five teams with 1079 followers.  One of five teams (Lions) has an Instagram following (712). Two of the five teams (Lions & Blues) have Twitter followings.

Do you have any partnerships with either businesses or other organizations to spread your awareness?

Palmer: no

Lions:no

Griffins: The gym we train at, our sponsor athletico, our sponsor Founders. Several youth/high school organizations.

Blues: We do have sponsors on 4 different levels (Platinum, Gold, Silver & Bronze) and we try to deliver a return of investment for these local businesses that sponsor us. We are also an affiliate member of the Sporting Club Network and have an active relationship with Sporting Kansas City and we sometimes use their Sporting Network social media to promote our larger events.

Barbarians:yes

Two of the five club teams (Palmer & Lions) do not have partnerships with other organizations.  Three of the club teams (Griffins, Blues, & Barbarians) do have partnerships with other organizations.  The Griffins have three sponsors and partner with youth and high school organizations.  The Blues have a system of sponsors on four different levels (Platinum, Gold, Silver, Bronze).  Additionally, the Blues are affiliated with the Sporting Club Network and have an active relationship with Sporting Kansas City, the local MLS team.

99

Have you made any attempts for reaching out for televised media? If so, was it acquired?

Palmer: no

Lions:no

Griffins:no

Blues: Not in a long time. Years ago I reached out to Metro Sports but it fizzled out. This would be something we are in a better position to do now and should probably look into again soon.

Barbarians: Yes, we had a full TV production crew for a few years.  A former player worked for the company.

Three of the five club teams (Palmer, Lions, Griffins) had not reached out to get television coverage.  Two of the five teams (Blues and Barbarians) had reached out to get television coverage in the past but had not reached out to get television coverage presently.  The Blues had attempted to get television coverage but it did not work out.  The Barbarians had gotten television coverage through a player that worked for the television crew.


**Interview Questions: PRO League**


What is your name and Title?

Assistant Director of Rugby Operations

How did your league start?

CEO, Doug Schroninger, had a vision and a plan.

How did you get involved with rugby?

Started playing rugby as a freshman in high school.

What is your background in mass communications?

Majored in Communications at Penn State


The PRO League social media chair's title is Assistant Director of Rugby Operations.

The PRO League began from the CEO Doug Schroninger executing plan and having a vision.

The Assistant Director began playing rugby as a freshman in high school. The Assistant Director

is a major in Communications from Penn State.

How were the decisions made to choose the cities in which your teams were designated?

Proper venues, rugby history, rugby population

What was your organization's goals to reaching audiences or building awareness to

people about your league/ team?

Sign players who are prominent in U.S. and connect with local rugby communities

Was your focus on rugby or non-rugby aware audiences?

At first, rugby-aware audiences

Was there a specific target audience or demographic you were wanting to reach?

Not necessarily, just rugby fans in general

What issues have arisen that you have seen in terms of your organizations success? (e.g. What

hurdles have you found in attempting to reach your goals?

Rugby community isn't as big as top sports leagues in the world.

Were the decisions on the strategy for mass communication done by a group or an individual?

Group

The designated cities that the PRO League (San Francisco, Cleveland, Denver,

Sacramento, Obetz, San Diego) were chosen for the PRO teams because of the cities venues,

rugby history of the locations, and the population of rugby communities. The goals of PRO to

reach audiences is to sign prominent players in the U.S. and to connect with local rugby

communities.  The focus, or target, for the Assistant Director to reach were initially rugby-aware

audiences.  There was not a specific demographic when targeting audience's other than reaching

rugby fans in general.  An issue that has arose in PRO's success is that the rugby community

isn't as big as top sports leagues in the world.  The decisions for the mass community strategy

were made by a group working at PRO.


What are your duties specifically for social media?

Create all tweets, post photos, create videos

Was your strategy for utilizing social media different that traditional medias?

(connecting with audiences, speed of updates, etc.) If so, what are your strategies?

Make sure constantly posting. Make broadcasts available to all (Facebook Live)

Which social media outlet did you utilize the most?

Twitter & Facebook

What types of posts (updates of games, player profiles, community outreach) were used the

most?

Updates, breaking news, rosters, game highlights, live game feeds

Why were these types of posts chosen?

Keeps fans informed and engaged


The social media outlets used by PRO are Twitter and Facebook.  The social media duties

for the Assistant Director of PRO are to create tweets, post photos, and create videos.  The types

of posts used most by PRO are updates, breaking news, game rosters, game highlights, and live

game feeds.  The Assistant Director's strategy for posting on social media is to port constantly and to make broadcasts available to all fans through streaming such as Facebook Live.  The types of posts were chosen to keep fans informed and engaged.

How many people follow your page?

36,000 on Facebook and 7,500 on Twitter

Is there anything that you would have liked to change about your approach of traditional media?

No, think we had a proper approach

Is there anything you would like to see from lower levels of rugby in terms of media coverage or usage?

More posts. Always keep fans updated.

Is there any advice you would like to give people that are designated social media officials of lower levels of rugby?

Always post. Fans love images & videos. Be creative

Which medium do you see rugby finding the most expansion?

Youtube

The social media followings for the PRO League are 36,000 on Facebook and 7,500 on Twitter.  The Assistant Director expressed that he believes that PRO had the proper approach when using traditional media.  The Assistant Director would like to see more posts from lower levels of rugby (club level) and for the lower levels to keep fans updated.  Advice from the Assistant Director to the club level rugby teams to always post and to be creative.  The PRO Assistant Director believes the social media outlet that rugby will find the most expansion is Youtube.

Are there other countries that you have seen expand rugby in the way the U.S. is attempting? If so, is there anything that you believe your organization can learn from to help with the expansion of rugby in the U.S.?

Super Rugby expanding to Japan and Argentina, find the top cities with high rugby/sports population

The PRO League Assistant Director explains that Super Rugby in Japan and Argentina are expanding the way rugby is expanding in the U.S. Further, the Assistant Director believes the U.S. rugby expansion would be helped from finding the top cities with high rugby populations like Japan and Argentina.